MERICAS

AND OTHER STORIES

By

CLEMENTINA BLACK.

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AUTHOR OF "A SUSSEX IDYL," "ORLANDO."

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NOTICE.

Two of the stories contained in this volume have already been published, one in the *University*, and one in the *New Quarterly Magazine*. The others are printed now for the first time.

C. B.

Brighton, September, 1880.

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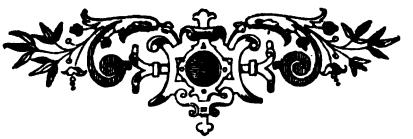

Mericas.

[The true circumstances on which this story is based may be found in the fifth volume of Nichol's "Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century."]

I WAS born at Lisbon in the year 1729, being the seventh and youngest daughter of Miguel Armento, a merchant of that city. My mother died when I was but a few months old. My father was by no means wealthy; the cares of his business absorbed him almost wholly; my elder sisters were so much older than myself that they were rather my teachers than my companions, and those who were nearer to my own age were pursuing their education in convents. I eagerly looked forward to the day when I also should be placed in a convent to learn the beautiful embroidery stitches of Erminia, and, perhaps, if I had a good voice, to sing like Isabella. But fate had other designs for me. One day, when I was about eight years old, I was sitting in my father's counting-house which adjoined our

house, and whither I often strayed for want of companionship, when two gentlemen came in. One was a little, yellow, good-humoured looking man, whom I knew and who seemed to me very old—far older, indeed, than at the present time I take him to be now. The other was a stranger, tall, and of a fair complexion. I remember that I noticed the excessive whiteness of his hands, as compared with my own little brown ones. I remember, too, that he wore a black ribbon, tied at his throat, instead of a lace cravat, and that this was the first instance which I had seen of that mode. His dress was of a dark plum-colour and his light-brown hair unpowdered. Children cannot judge of age. Mr. Godstone's appeared to me considerable enough to inspire awe. I know now that he must have been a few years over twenty.

My father was absent, and in his place sat I, like some elvish creature, watching the strangers out of my dark eyes. The young man looked at me with a kindly air, and leaning his arms upon the table which divided us, asked me my name. He spoke slowly and with a strange accent. I answered him "Mericas," and he began to tell me that he had a little niece of about my age—how old was I, six?

I explained with dignity that I was already eight years old, and, my father coming in, bade me run to my sisters. Mr. Godstone, with a bow and smile, opened the counting-house door for me, and I went upstairs to tell Erminia and Isabella that I had

seen a man in the counting-house who had light hair and spoke strangely, like St. George in the story book.

I soon heard that Mr. Godstone had asked my father's permission for me to visit his little niece, who was as much in need of a playfellow as myself. My father gladly consented, for Mr. Godstone belonged to a firm of English merchants equally wealthy and honourable, and Madame Rolandi, his sister, was accounted one of the most distinguished and beautiful women in Lisbon. She was the widow of a Swedish gentleman, who had been resident in the city, and who had left her but ill-provided for. The generosity of her brother, however, prevented her from experiencing the least inconvenience. She resided in his house and ruled it and him with absolute sway. A sister-in-law, the widow of his elder brother, with her orphan son and daughter, were also dependent upon Mr. Godstone, who, by the death of his father and brother, was left to face the world unaided, and to bear the burdens of all the family. Madame Rolandi was a few years his senior, and at the time when I first beheld her was certainly a most beautiful woman. She was, like her brother, tall and fair, and of a most majestic carriage. The cast of their features had also much resemblance, but nature seemed to have erred in the allotment of their dispositions, for while Madame Rolandi was of a masculine temper, imperious and commanding,

Mr. Godstone had a tenderness of heart and compassionate gentleness toward all weaker creatures which we are wont to consider as the peculiar share of the softer sex.

Miss Letty Rolandi, Madame's only child, was a year or two younger than myself. She was, however, considerably taller, of a truly surprising fairness, but somewhat heavy-looking, and her face wanting in the vivacity and wit of her mother's. Madame Rolandi was passionately fond of her, and thought no indulgence too great, no expense too profuse, to be bestowed upon her darling. To me the apartment of Miss Rolandi seemed a kind of fairyland, and the beautiful lady whom she called "mother" seemed its presiding genius. My unfeigned admiration of all that I beheld gave Miss Rolandi pleasure ; but my inability to understand her when she spoke in English provoked her. Notwithstanding this defect, she wept when I took leave of her, and would only be pacified when her uncle promised that I should come again, soon and often. It was the first time that anyone had seemed to desire my presence, and before I fell asleep I offered thanks to the saints for putting love for me into the heart of the little English girl. From that day my life was a changed one. Miss Rolandi's fancy for me increased daily, and I, on my part, felt it so inestimable a blessing to be loved that I was willing to follow her wishes in all things. By degrees I shared all her lessons, those only ex-

cepted which she received from the chaplain of the English Embassy. Our play-hours, also, were spent together, and she would scarce be satisfied to suffer me an hour out of her sight. She might have had many another playfellow, but she cared for none of them. She said they teased her; and, in fact, it is likely that they would not yield as I did to all her desires. In me this was no merit, for I was naturally of a compliant temper, and in trifles cared not to lead. My father was glad to encourage a friendship so advantageous to me, and for myself, I may say that I was truly happy. I preserved, however, a considerable fear of Madame Rolandi, whose excessive beauty, haughtiness, and apparently unlimited power made her seem to me like the inhabitant of another sphere. For Mr. Godstone, I had ever the most unfeigned admiration and love, and his grave smile and kind commendation were the prizes for which I strove. How often have I lain awake, repeating over and over some new English phrase with which to greet him the next day; and how dear to me was the approving "my good little Mericas!" with which he received it. Thus the years went on. Miss Rolandi grew into a tall young woman; I myself remained but a small creature, and as dark as she was fair. When I was near twenty years old, I heard with grief that my happy life was to be at an end. My English friends were about to leave Lisbon, and to take up their abode in London. It was Mr. Godstone who first

announced to me this sad stroke. I met him on the threshold of the house as I returned from visiting High Mass with two of my sisters. He was evidently about going out: but on seeing me he changed his purpose, and, turning back, said, "Mericas, I have news for you which, I fear, will somewhat distress you."

He followed me into the parlour, which was empty, and I awaited his next words.

"We have decided to return to England. My sister, now that Letty has come to years of womanhood, very naturally desires that she should appear in her own country, and there form a suitable establishment. But 'tis a sad grief to her to think of parting from you, Mericas, who have been to her," he was pleased to say, "the most tender and amiable of friends."

I stood silent, for, indeed, the blow was so sudden and so unprepared that I knew not what to reply.

"I would fain think that you, too, will be sorry to part from your English friends," said Mr. Godstone.

"Oh, sir," said I, "I cannot tell what will become of my life when you are all gone away."

Then I recalled what he had said of Letty's sorrow, and I blamed myself for giving way to my own, instead of hastening to soften hers.

"Is Miss Rolandi indeed so grieved?" I ventured to ask.

He sighed, and answered that she appeared

altogether inconsolable, adding, "Go to her, my child; and try to comfort her."

I went accordingly to Miss Rolandi's room, where I found her bathed in tears and uttering the most piteous lamentations. I put my arms round her, and tried, as well as I could to appease her; but her passion was infectious, and I could not refrain from mingling my tears with hers. Madame Rolandi was in despair, and rebuked me sharply for weeping.

"I will not go to England," cried Miss Rolandi. "Why will you be so cruel as to try to force me to what I hate? Why does my uncle say I ought to go? You are jealous of Mericas, all of you, because you think I love her best. You want me to be parted from my only friend, so that you may do what you please with me."

"My dear child, my sweet Letty!" exclaimed her mother, wringing her hands. "How can you make me so wretched?"

And, "Oh, Miss Letty, why will you distress your sweet mamma?" said Rebecca, Madame Rolandi's maid; but Miss Letty bade her sharply to hold her tongue.

"You will find other friends in England, Miss Rolandi," said I; for I could think of no other consolation.

"I don't desire any other friends. I want you to go with me," she said, and then gave way once more to a violent burst of weeping, crying out,

between her tears, that we were all against her, and that Mericas would be glad to be rid of her. At that I had well-nigh wept too, but, by a strong effort, restrained my tears. Nor would she be pacified until Madame Rolandi, who was herself scarce less distressed, had promised her brother should beg my father's leave that I should accompany them.

"But," she cried, turning to me, "you do not wish to go. You are weary of me. You do not love me any longer. Nay, you had best confess it. You had best say so at once. Oh, you will break my heart among you, and I shall die, and then you will all be sorry."

"Nay, but I do desire to go with you. I desire it more than anything on earth—if only it were possible."

A step came to the door, and Mr. Godstone's voice was heard, asking whether Miss Rolandi was now better. She sprang up, demanding that he should come in, and Rebecca admitted him.

"Oh! uncle," cried Miss Rolandi, raising her streaming eyes to his face, "take Mericas with us, take Mericas with us."

"Nay, but Letty"—began Mr. Godstone.

She cast herself at his feet, stopping her ears with her hands, and exclaiming, "I will not go unless Mericas goes; I will not go!"

I saw a slight tinge of colour come into Mr.

Godstone's cheek. He bent down, raised her gently in his arms, and said, "Letty, listen to me."

She turned her face away, petulantly, but she left her ears unstopped.

"I am going at once to Senhor Armento, to make the very request which you have made to me. But before I do so, I must know one thing."

He led his niece back to the chair from which she had risen on his entrance, and, taking my hand as I stood behind it, asked kindly,

"My dear Mericas, is it your wish to come with us? I cannot let you sacrifice your happiness, even to secure Letty's; and if you cannot freely say, 'I prefer to go to England,' you shall not be asked to go."

"I do; I should prefer it," I anwered most earnestly and most sincerely: and he, dropping my hand, bowed to me, and said,

"Then I go to your father."

My father was but too glad of an opportunity of placing me so advantageously. He made but one condition, which was that I should remain constant to the Roman Catholic faith. Mr. Godstone promised that I should have every opportunity for the observances of my religion—a promise which he most scrupulously fulfilled. My two remaining sisters (one was now married, two were become nuns, and one—the nearest to me in age and the dearest—was dead, two years before, of a slow fever) esteemed me most fortunate, and my father

bade me be careful to show my gratitude to my kind friends. He told me also that he would not have trusted me so far from home with Madame Rolandi and her daughter only—who might, if I should chance to offend them, cast me off—but that his great reliance was in Mr. Godstone, "who is," said he, "the soul of honour, and who has been almost a second father to you." He further bade me, if any motion of marriage should chance to be made to me, that I should submit myself to the counsel of Mr. Godstone as to his own, and made me promise to him that I would take no step in the matter of marriage without Mr. Godstone's sanction. This I promised very heartily, and the remembrance of these words, which were in a manner my father's last injunction, for I saw him no more, served as matter for reflection to me in many a long and lonely hour afterwards.

Thus it was that, at the age of nineteen, I quitted my native country, and, I think, am like never to see it again, save in my dreams. I will not speak of the discomforts of our voyage, further than to say that Madame Rolandi and her daughter were very ill, and I still more so, and that Mr. Godstone showed a never-failing kindness to us in our wretched condition. We reached England in the early part of the year 1749, and were soon established in a handsome house which Mr. Godstone had taken in Pall-mall. He took also a smaller one in the City for his clerks, counting-house, &c., and

was soon as busily employed as ever, while his place in Lisbon was filled by his nephew, Mr. Charles Godstone, and by Mr. Diaz, his head clerk, the kindly little man in whose company I had first beheld him. And now began a life of pleasure and convenience, such as I had never dreamed of. Madame Rolandi had a vast number of friends in London and in the country, and the circle daily increased. Her beauty, which was still remarkable, and the reputation of a wealth which she did not in fact possess, drew around her a crowd of admirers. She might, I am sure, have married to great advantage, but she had acquired a taste for independence, and, though she might desire it for her daughter, was by no means ambitious of marriage for herself. Letty, too, was not without her lovers, of whom she seemed to distinguish now one, now another, though she agreed with me that not one of them was worthy of being seriously distinguished. Indeed, I could not but suspect that their addresses were paid rather to *Mr. Godstone's heiress* than to *Letty Rolandi.* And yet, perhaps, I am unjust, since the absence of such addresses to myself may well have proceeded from my want of charms as well as of fortune, for I well know that I was less handsome than she, besides being known to be a foreigner and a Roman Catholic. I received, of course, my inevitable share in those unmeaning compliments with which, in these days, every man of fashion considers it his part to insult the under-

standing as well as the modesty of his female acquaintance, but these I knew how to rate at their proper value.

We visited plays (the unrivalled Mr. Garrick had then but newly begun his surprising career), concerts (which to me were the most ravishing entertainments of all), assemblies, routs, and balls. As the season advanced we made acquaintance with the pleasures of Ranelagh and Vauxhall, and it was projected that we should visit Bath; but circumstances combined to frustrate this design, and it was reserved to me to become acquainted with that town at a more particular crisis of my history. Our accomplishments in dancing were but slender, and we set to work to perfect our execution in the matter of minuets and country dances. Mr. Godstone, to our surprise, would often join us, and many a pleasant hour have we had thus, which, to my mind, outweighed the gayer pleasures of ball or assembly, for at these latter amusements Mr. Godstone, when he attended, did not join in the diversions of the younger part, but rather attached himself to the ranks of the elders. Unlike most men who, when they have passed the age of thirty, appear desirous to linger on its bounds, he rather pressed onward to assume more age than he possessed. His dress, for instance, was always grave in colour, and his manner plain and simple. Nor had he that tone of gay trifling towards women which seems to mark a possible suitor, and this notwith-

standing a most especial courteousness, which was extended as well to those below him as to his equals in rank.'

But, to proceed with my narrative, there was an old friendship between Mr. Godstone's family and that of Mr. Edward Preston, a young gentleman who had gained some distinction as a volunteer against the Scotch rebels some few years previous, at which time he had scarce attained the age of twenty. Mr. Preston was now invited to visit at Mr. Godstone's house, and both families were desirous to arrange a marriage between him and Letty, a desire to which neither of the young people was, I believe, a stranger. Mr. Godstone, I observed, seemed to look forward with peculiar impatience to Mr. Preston's arrival. He gave us a very particular account of the young gentleman's fine air and character for bravery. And then, turning to his sister, he added, with a kind of half sigh, "You must expect to see the family face in him, Letitia."

She looked at him without replying, and he, in an undertone, half to her, half to himself, dropped the words, "So like —," and then, leaning his face on his hand sank into a reverie. Letty, who was reading the first volume of that enthralling book "The History of Clarissa Harlowe," had looked up when her uncle spoke of Mr. Preston, but when he ceased, returned to her reading. Madame Rolandi was at her tambour-frame. I sat hemming

some cambric ruffles for a morning gown, and, my occupation being less engrossing than theirs, my mind wandered from it. I had looked up, moved by I know not what tone in Mr. Godstone's words, and my eyes unconsciously fixed themselves upon his face. I thought of that day in my father's counting-house, and of the fair, young Englishman who had spoken so kindly to a little lonely child. Then my memory travelled onward. I saw him as I had known him through all these years, thinking always of his sister, his nephew, his nieces, his brother's widow, his duties as a merchant; never, in any anxiety, too much preoccupied to have kindly remembrance of all about him, and of me among the rest. And now those for whom he had toiled were growing up and spreading their wings to seek other shelters. The sister, for whom he had done so much, regarded his happiness but little, and he was moving towards the latter period of life only to be left alone. All these thoughts were in my mind as I watched his face. The grave sweetness of his look was somewhat deepened, and its melancholy cast made me feel as if I could cover my face and weep. I suppose he must have felt my eyes upon him, for he looked up suddenly, and, meeting my gaze, asked "Why so grave, Mericas?"

I knew not what to answer. His question drew the eyes of the ladies upon me, and I know that I blushed deeply, though, indeed, I knew not why I

should; and he, seeing that his question had confused me, did not press me further, but, putting it aside, took up my guitar, played a chord or two, and then, with a smile, asked me if I would sing. This exercise was my greatest pleasure, and I consented gladly, for I knew that he loved to hear me. I sang, and Mr. Godstone stood before me, resting his one hand against the high chimney-piece, and his forehead against that, while his other hand fingered his sword hilt, listening with a dreamy look in his eyes.

The next day, while Mr. Godstone was away in the city, Madame Rolandi began to speak to us again of Mr. Preston's coming, and of her acquaintance with his family. I was kneeling on a low stool before her, holding a skein of silk, which she was winding. Letty, who did not love work, was leaning back in her chair, while she idly teased her parrot, which gave, from time to time, a discordant shriek of anger. Madame Rolandi told us that the Preston family consisted of four daughters and two sons, of whom Mr. Edward Preston was the youngest, his elder brother being his senior by nearly twenty years—a widower, with no child; and that his sisters had all married to much advantage, "though," she added, glancing across at the panels of mirror let into the fireplace below the chimney-board, "they were none of them very remarkable for beauty, the eldest alone excepted. She, indeed, was a lovely creature.

Some thought her to be the finest woman in London."

"And is that the sister whom my uncle says that Mr. Preston resembles?" Letty asked, with interest.

"Yes; and if it be so, I am impatient to see him. I saw her once, dressed for a birthday, in a suit of pale blue, flowered with silver. She looked like an angel, walked out of a dream. I remember who said that of her."

I looked down at a knot in the silk, and some hidden feeling made me sure that it was Mr. Godstone who had said so.

"And what became of her? But of course she married," said Letty.

"She was very near to being your aunt, Letty."

"Oh, lord!" said Letty, "she would have cast us all into the shade."

I saw that Madame Rolandi glanced across once more at her own image, and she smiled a little haughtily. Indeed, it must have been a beautiful sister-in-law who should have eclipsed her, even then.

"She was older than he was," Madame Rolandi continued; "and she had trifled with him, while he was still a boy, and she, an accomplished coquette."

"To think of uncle Richard as having ever been

a boy, and in love with a coquette too!" laughed Letty.

"He was in earnest, I can assure you. His duel with Lord Armingham was on her account."

"I thought it was a quarrel at cards."

"They gave it out so, but it was for Barbara Preston's sake; and it was pretty well known at the time that it was so. And it was very ill-thought of, too, in a man like Lord Armingham, to fight a youth of nineteen, not yet from college, as my brother was. But, I believe, myself, that the quarrel was of Richard's seeking, and that Lord Armingham could not help himself."

"And what did Miss Preston say?" Letty asked once more.

"She was a good deal touched, I believe. I know she visited him at my father's house, and when she saw his arm in a sling, she burst into tears. I saw that, myself. Then Richard said, he valued his arm only if he might use it for her. And the next day, in spite of his wound, he rode over to make his formal request to her father; and when he arrived, his groom said, he was as white as a statue with the pain, and his teeth clenched together, but he threw up his head, and went in, bravely. And when he came into Sir William Preston's study, Sir William would have had him drink a glass of wine. "Nay," said he, "but let me speak, first." And so he began, and got so far as to Barbara's name, and then put up his hand to his forehead, and groaned,

and fell forward, in a swoon into Sir William's arms. And then, for a fortnight, he was in a high fever, and unable to be moved, and lay at Preston Hall, calling out always on Barbara. And the end of it was that she vowed no other man had ever so loved her as he had done, and she would marry him or none."

"Oh, how came it then"—said I. And Madame Rolandi completed my broken sentence—"that she did not keep her promise? You shall hear. When my brother recovered—if that can be called a recovery, when he rose up looking like his ghost, so white and thin, and taller by two inches—my father decided that he should go for a year to Portugal, and I with him to watch over his health. And, so, we went, and there, as you know, I met your father, Letty, and we were married; and then my father was taken ill, and Richard was summoned home. Then began our family troubles. My father died, and your uncle Charles died, leaving your aunt and the children to Richard's care—that was your uncle Charles's way; he married a pretty face, and never thought how they were to live, and then, when he had got himself into an insuperable embarrassment, he died, and handed it on to Richard."

I could not help thinking that it was rather Madame Rolandi's way, too; but I knew how differently appear those circumstances which have befallen others, and those in which we have ourselves been actors.

"Then," continued Madame Rolandi, "my husband died, and I was left alone in a strange country. I wrote to Richard, begging him to come to me in my trouble and my loneliness, and he came. Then he found that his affairs in Lisbon were such as required a thorough investigation, and that, if he desired to save anything of our father's property, he must remain there for at least some years. He wrote to Miss Preston, telling her of this necessity, and begging her either to let him come back and marry her immediately, or to wait until he could return and take her to a secure, though a poorer, home than he had hoped. Her mother answered it. She said, her daughter's health was too weak to suffer her to live out of England; that Richard was too young, and his position too uncertain for marrying; that Barbara was older than he, and could ill afford to wait for her lover till her beauty left her; that she might have had more advantageous alliances but for her promise to him; and that he himself might change, being so young. And Richard wrote, '*Let me have a word in her own hand, and if she does indeed desire to be rid of me, I will trouble her no more.*' And by the next ship, she wrote a long letter. I know not what, for he never showed it. And within six months after, she married my Lord Amesworthy, and is since dead."

"Oh! how *could* she?" I cried.

"You are a child, Mericas. Was it not for the

best? What would have become of me and Letty —ay, and of you too—if he had come home to marry a London beauty? And as to love, child, those are not the worst off, who have the flower without the fruit. My brother, himself, knows now that he is better single. He is far too gentle for a husband. A wife would make him wretched. And do you suppose that any other woman would have been to him what I have been—I, who know his wishes and his habits as no stranger whom he might have married could have known them? And is not Letty like his own daughter to him? Depend upon it, Mericas, she did the best thing for him, as well as for herself, and he knows it."

But I recalled the look that had been in Mr. Godstone's eyes, and my heart ached.

On the next day but one after this, Mr. Preston was to arrive. He was to come from his brother's estate in the country, so was not expected till late in the evening. Madame Rolandi and her daughter were gone, that morning, shopping, into the city. I, being left alone, seated myself at the harpsichord, singing songs of my own country; and under the spell of music, which was always powerful upon me, had forgotten all else. Suddenly, a little clinking sound in the room aroused me. Startled, I looked round, and beheld a young man, standing, with his hat in his hand, and contemplating me with attention. He was fashionably dressed in pale brown satin, a bow of blue on his sword-hilt, and

had an unmistakeable air of fashion and distinction. I stared at him, I fear, with unmannerly surprise.

"Forgive me, madam," he said, with a profound bow, "that I have presumed to play the spy upon you. I was told that I should find the ladies here, and coming in, was ravished by the sweet sounds which a sweeter mouth discoursed. I could not, madam, dare to interrupt you. But for my unlucky sword, which at some slight motion, struck against a chair and betrayed me, I would have rejoiced to stand thus for ever."

"And pray, sir," said I, not much regarding this fine speech, which I am sure he had studied during the pause, "may I have the honour to know to whom I am speaking?"

Then, with another bow, "I am Edward Preston, madam, and your devoted servant." I curtsied, and begged him to be seated.

But he: "Tell me, first, that you pardon me for intruding upon you thus. Let me not feel myself an Actæon, invading the haunts of an offended Diana —and if, indeed, I have offended, I have paid, like Actæon, a price which for aught else had been heavy."

"Nay, nay, sir, pray do not accuse me of transforming you. I assure you I am not such a terrible person. Once more, I beg you will be seated. You will find a volume of a novel close to your hand, which may, perhaps, divert you for a quarter of an hour,"—and I moved towards the door.

"Still so inexorable? Will the goddess, although

she cease to kill, banish, and withdraw the light of her presence from me?"

"The goddess, sir—since goddess I am to be—will, with your leave, retire to change her dress before dinner, and will beg Miss Clarissa Harlowe to supply her place."

"Your place," said the absurd creature, "is not to be supplied by any substitute, and when you go, you take with you that of mine which you know not" (I stared), "and which I would not have again." Laying his hands on his heart, he bowed once more, and yet more profoundly than before. His good looks—for he was indeed very handsome—his fine voice, and elegant bearing, saved his over-exalted compliments from being altogether ridiculous. Indeed, he was one of those persons who can perform even a foolish act with grace, and almost save it from folly, however foolish it be, by seeming never ashamed of it.

I again curtsied, and said, "I am sorry, sir, that Madame and Miss Rolandi are not here to receive you. Mr. Godstone had told them to expect you this evening only."

"What! Are you not Miss Rolandi?" said Mr. Preston, and he looked so disconcerted that I could not forbear laughing, as I thought of all the fine things which he had wasted on me.

"Oh no, sir, by no means. Permit me to restore to you the elegant compliments which were meant as

offerings to Miss Rolandi. and which are, indeed, ill-suited enough to me."

I made a little gesture, as if I handed them back to him, and withdrew hastily, before he could reply.

When I came down, just before dinner, I found him sitting with Madame and Miss Rolandi.

Mr. Godstone had just returned, and followed me into the room in his riding dress.

"Ha! Ned, are you there already? I thought you were not to reach London till to-night. I see I need not make you acquainted with the ladies."

"No, sir," said Mr. Preston; "I have had to present myself, modest as I am."

The smile that sat upon his fine face as he said this suited him so well, his air was so easy and *degagé*, that I could not wonder that Mr. Godstone's eyes rested upon him with pleasure. Letty's face, too, wore a strange, half-petulant smile of gratification, like that of a spoiled child who has a new toy given it, and is half in pleasure at the toy, half in fear lest it should break, and ready, if it does, to turn a torrent of reproach on the giver. Mr. Godstone left us to change his dress, but, soon returning, we went to dinner. It was a gay meal. Mr. Preston sat between Madame Rolandi and her daughter, and kept them in high good humour. He had a lively wit, and seemed to say sparkling things with ease. Mr. Godstone said but little, but looked on, smiling. To me Mr. Preston scarce

spoke, but, when I chanced to look up, I more than once met his eyes, and I had an uncomfortable feeling—as if his mind watched me, even when his eyes were absent.

When we three ladies had withdrawn, leaving the gentlemen to their wine, the conversation fell at once on the new guest. Madame Rolandi was loud in commendation. Letty would only say that he was well enough *for a man;* yet she would not suffer the conversation to wander from him. For my part I said, being appealed to, that he was indeed very handsome, and that I thought he appeared like a good dancer. Then Letty smiled suddenly, and I was quite sure that she thought of Lady Pentwhistle's ball. After awhile, the gentlemen came up. The tea equipage was served, and while the cups were handing round, appeared no less a person than Lady Pentwhistle herself, accompanied by Lady Lucy, her niece. Captain Ferrers and his friend, Mr. Ellcott, soon after followed, both of whom were numbered in the ever-shifting train of Letty's admirers. Then it was that I observed how much fascination Mr. Preston really possessed. There was that about this young gentleman which gave him an ascendency in all societies. Compared with him, Captain Ferrers seemed clownish, and Mr. Ellcott, formal. The discourse soon fell upon her ladyship's ball.

"I trust, Mr. Preston," she said, turning her

diamond snuff-box this way and that, "that I may number you among my guests."

"I account myself honoured, madam, in the permission," he replied, bowing.

Letty, who was speaking to Lady Lucy of a new mode in tippets, made one moment's halt in her talk, and the soft colour deepened a little on her fair, round cheek. I thought, as I looked at her, how pretty it was possible to her to be when she was pleased. To my surprise (I think to hers also), Mr. Preston did not beg leave to be her partner,* but turned to Mr. Godstone with some remark which escaped my ear. A sullen look dropped like a cloud over Letty's face, and she scarce spoke another word. Mr. Ellcott, a few minutes after, humbly requested the promise of her hand for the ball, which she gave, ungraciously enough. Her mother frowned, and I—I know not why—felt sure that Mr. Preston had heard what passed. He gave, however, no evidence of having done so, but disengaged himself from Mr. Godstone, and coming to Miss Rolandi, asked whether she would condescend to accept of a very indifferent partner for the evening's amusement on Wednesday.

"I have given my promise already," Letty replied; but she looked somewhat appeased by his having, although too late, at least proffered the request.

* It was customary to retain the same partner throughout the whole evening.

Then said Mr. Preston, "Alas! how unfortunate am I."

Some minutes after, sitting—it seemed by chance next me, he said in a low tone, "May I trust that Miss Armento will permit me the hope of becoming her partner, in token that she forgives my rash intrusion on her privacy?"

I bowed acceptance, and I will not deny that I had a certain base satisfaction in the thought of so distinguished a partner, for I loved dancing, and knew that I danced well. Yet I was a little angry, too, at the manœuvre which I could not but suspect him of having accomplished, and by no means had a mind to be made the object of attentions so double-faced.

Mr. Preston did not again address me, but devoted himself to Miss Rolandi, and slowly she recovered her good humour under the influence of of his pleasing flatteries. A little later, he begged her to sing, and she, after due persuasion, consented. Soon, by a dexterous art on his part, I was called to the harpsichord to assist in finding a song. My guitar was taken up, and Mr. Preston, all the while addressing Miss Rolandi, so contrived that I was brought, in spite of my efforts to get away, to play and sing. I perceived that Mr. Preston at first continued to talk to Miss Rolandi as before; but, suddenly breaking off, "Pardon me, madam," says he, "I am interrupting your enjoyment of the music. The pleasure of your conver-

sation had almost made me forgetful of the rules of politeness."

And, drawing back a little, he stood behind her chair, with the appearance of attending on her pleasure. I could not but observe, as he stood how elegant was his posture, yet with a natural gracefulness which, compared with the captain and his friend, reminded me oddly of Mr. Garrick seen on the stage with a couple of raw performers, of whom the one was stiff and ill at ease, the other pedantic. And when I ceased, he said to me merely, "I thank you, madam;" but he lifted his eyes to mine, and let me see in them a shining, almost like tears.

But, if he supposed that I should be overwhelmed by this testimony of his emotion, he mistook me.

The grave face of Mr. Godstone, who had paused in his talk to Lady Pentwhistle to hear the mournful ballad, which I had chosen because I knew it to be his favourite, moved me more, a hundredfold, than all the elegancies of this fine gentleman. I drew back into a corner, and amused myself by comparing the one with the other. Mr. Preston would, doubtless, have been reckoned the handsomer—the advantages of youth, fashion, and a more careful attire were his; but on Mr. Godstone's side of the account lay a nobility of soul, which shone through his face, and gave to him a simple dignity whose charm far outweighed the restless vivacity of the other. A child or a dog might have looked askance at the keen smile of

Mr. Preston, but would have come to touch the hand, or lay itself at the feet of Mr. Godstone.

Lady Pentwhistle's ball approached. I confess that I looked forward to it with alarm. Not only I feared the jealous angers of Letty, but I disliked the thought of spending so much of my evening, publicly and perforce, in the society of Mr. Preston. I was relieved that, when I informed Letty of my promise, she was rather pleased than angry, considering that Mr. Preston intended a compliment to herself in choosing me, as the nearest to her, since she, herself, was not to be had. I trusted, therefore, that all might pass well; the rather that Mr. Preston made only regretful allusions to the ball. Mr. Godstone was not to be of the party, having made his excuses to her ladyship on the score of a business engagement.

And now I must own the plain truth. When once I had set foot in the brilliant room, heard the enticing music, and put my hand into that of my elegant cavalier, I thought no more of Letty's jealousy, my own dislike of Mr. Preston, or anything else, save the exceeding pleasure of the dance, and the gratification of feeling many eyes upon us. A conciousness of power and triumph came to me. I suppose I felt something of the intoxication which attends on beauties, and leads them, often, to so excessive displays of coquetry. Such a moment comes once, perhaps, to every woman, as I have heard it said that even the

homely have their moment of beauty, once in their lives. I do not care to recall the time. The feelings which ruled in my breast were, I know, ungenerous, and, I think, even unwomanly. They taught me to think less hardly of those whose temptations are great, but they made me unwilling to turn my eyes inward upon myself.

Dance followed dance. I heard more than one voice ask who was the little lady in the primrose coloured dress. Others I heard, who praised our graceful dancing; and, certainly, never have I walked a minuet with a partner who so perfectly fulfilled the meaning of the dance. One spirit seemed to stir in us both, as we moved, foot to foot, and fall to fall, of the pulsing music. If life were all a minuet, I would have desired no other companion to walk it with me. I have thought, too, that, though I had by no means his grace of person, I may have been a more fitting partner to him than a finer woman, for though, beholding him, one was unwilling to confess any external fault in him, his elegance touched almost the limits of effeminacy. I little and slight as I was, might the rather give manliness to a form which, standing beside Miss Rolandi, might have appeared—though but a little—to want strength and tallness. But perhaps I, accustomed to the stately height of Mr. Godstone, may scarce have judged fairly of Mr. Preston, and, certainly, I never heard others speak of his outer looks as less than perfect.

As we rode home from Lady Pentwhistle's, Madame Rolandi and Letty were both out of spirits, and Letty more than a little pettish. On me had fallen the blankness which was apt—partly, I think because I was not very robust—to follow any strong pleasure, so that I leaned back, and said little. Mr. Preston, however, talked enough for all. He sat by me, Letty and her mother facing us. He addressed all his discourse to Letty, and presently I saw a light of pleasure stealing into her eyes, and the sweet rosiness dawning upon her cheek. Once he touched her hand, and the rose deepened. "Oh, man!" I thought; "you who claim to be stronger and nobler than we, how can you complain of woman, if you, too, can trifle thus with a thing so sacred as a girl's first love?"

And as I descended the last from the carriage, and laid my hand in his, he let fall upon me a laughing glance of mocking triumph, which sent me in sad at heart, and ashamed of him, of myself, and of the world.

Now, I knew that, not many days later, we were to go to another ball, and "surely," I had thought, "this time Mr. Preston will invite Miss Rolandi."

But, to my surprise, when I happened to be alone in the drawing-room next morning—a thing which, since his coming, I had avoided, but now was busy arranging flowers in the china pots—Mr. Preston came in, and in a hurried manner, said to

me, "Miss Armento, may I hope to renew on Monday the joys of last night?"

I would not understand him; partly, indeed, I did doubt whether he could possibly mean to neglect Letty once more.

"I hope you may, I am sure," I replied, indifferently, and, turning my back upon him, while I took out some roses which were faded, and replaced them by fresh ones. He followed me, and I heard his voice close at my ear.

"Nay, but may I hope indeed? May I again have *you* for my partner?"

I went round the table to another vase, and when the table was between us, looked him in the face, and said, "No, sir. I thank you for your politeness, but it is impossible."

"How impossible? has someone been before me?"

I did not reply. I hoped he might believe it, without forcing me to say that it was so.

"Am I too late?" he asked again, in an accent which was ridiculously despairing for such an occasion.

I bowed my head affirmatively, and he turned away with an impatient gesture. I was just thinking how luckily I had got over the scene, when I felt my hand caught in his, his quick breath among my hair, and his voice at my ear again, "Will you not look at me? What have I done that you hate me?"

"Sir," said I, turning sharply round, "will you

set this vase for me on the chimney-board? I can scarce reach so high." And I pointed out a heavy pot, which he, looking a little disconcerted, took in both hands and set me free.

I hastened to sweep the rest of the roses, new and old, into my apron, that I might at once escape. He returned, however, upon me before I had finished; but we were now face to face, and so long as I looked at him, I felt able to keep him in check.

"You will pay me for my service, will you not?" he said, "with a rose as sweet as yourself."

"Oh, by all means," I answered; and, taking up a large tea-rose, whose creamy tints melted almost into a yellow brown, added "This, I think, is as near as may be to my complexion."

I held it out, but he hesitated, and, saying "It is overblown: this, rather, resembles you," took from my apron a scarce opened damask bud, whose dye was the deepest carnation, and fixed it in his coat, where it showed upon the pale brown with so much advantage that I could not but suspect him of having chosen it for that cause. I dropped him a curtsey—said, from the threshold of the door, "Remember, sir, it is of your taking, not my giving," and vanished, taking with me the impression of his face, changed from gratification to vexation.

On the stairs I passed Letty, who was coming to the drawing room. With what face he could receive her I know not, nor what he could say

to make her look so happy as, all the day after, she did.

That evening, there were again visitors. Mr. Preston, to my great relief, scarce spoke to me, but passing by me, he looked at me, and carried his hand to the rose which still bloomed in his coat. There was singing that evening also, but I would not be prevailed on to take part—not although Mr. Godstone asked it of me. And I saw in Madame Rolandi's eyes that she approved my refusal, for she had given me pretty clearly to understand that I had held too forward a place the night before. "Though indeed," she said, "'twas rather Mr. Ellcott's doing than yours, who fore-engaged Letty." And when she said this, how thankful was I that I had refused to dance yet another time with Mr. Preston.

It was on the next day to this that a little incident happened which vexed me much. After dinner, when we were sitting all together in the drawing room, Mr. Preston begged to have the ladies' opinion on a copy of verses which he had writ the night before. Madame Rolandi of course consented, and he read the following to us :

TO CYNTHIA, SINGING.

A nymph in yonder grove I heard,
Like Philomela, sing,
Her voice was like a mounting bird
That soars with quivering wing.

A slave, enthralled by music's chain,
I stood before her throne;
My tender heart, with pleasing pain,
Confessed itself her own.

But when to paint my woes I strove,
She mocked me into air.
Ye gods! why made ye cold to love,
One whom ye made so fair?

How comes it that so sweet a song
From frozen lips should flow?
Or she who lights a flame so strong
Should fail to feel its glow?

But, Syren, cease to mock a fire
With which you yet may burn;
You, too, by Cupid's vengeful ire,
May love without return.

And, Muse, that didst inspire the fair,
Inspire her lover too,
Lest, if I perish in despair,
Dame Venus frown on you.

I felt myself grow hot all over with annoyance. Madame Rolandi began to say some very handsome things about his elegant fancy. Letty looked down blushing, smiling with a pretty wavering smile, and twisting her fingers in the ribbons of her apron. I could scarce, as I looked at her, forbear my indignation against the man who could proffer undesired attentions to another woman under the mask of her all but avowed preference. I could not but behold with amazement the effrontery which could meet her candid blue eyes, lay the paper, bowing, upon her lap, and then turn to shoot a glance of appeal from under his eyelids at me. I felt as if the dagger which my countrywomen are said to have worn wound in

their locks for the avenging of love-falsehoods would have been a temptation to my fingers.

That evening, Letty came to my room, her eyes shining with a great delight.

"Oh, Mericas!" said she, and took me round the neck, and kissed me.

I felt tears of great compassion rise up for her in my heart, but I could not say a word.

Then she drew from the pocket of her apron the paper with the verses, and read them through again with a trembling voice. But when she came to these two lines:

'You too, by Cupid's vengeful ire,
May love without return.'

she looked at me with an April smile, sweet tears in her eyes, and shook her head. "Oh, Mericas?" said she again, "If you could but know how happy I am! is he not the handsomest man you ever saw?"

I was glad that I could truly answer I thought he was.

"And such a noble air! and so modest too! None of the confidence of that odious Captain Ferrers."

Then again she looked at the paper.

"And are they not sweet verses, Mericas?

'My tender heart, with pleasing pain,
Confessed itself her own.'

Ah! but I must not be too cold, must I? I do not mean to drive him to despair. I do confess that I was a little vexed that he went away from the harpsichord while I was singing."

Then she laid the paper against her cheek, and let her fresh, young lips but just touch it, yet that touch brought the roses after it. I think if I could have spoken to Mr. Preston at that moment, I might have shamed him into a better conduct. It was well that Letty, involved in her own love, scarcely perceived my silence.

Now, during all these days, I was rather troubled, because I had, in truth, no partner for Mrs. Courtenay's ball. More than once I inclined to feign an indisposition and so stay at home; but besides that I disliked the crookedness of the expedient, I feared lest the watchful Mr. Preston should perceive that no cavalier came up to inquire what had become of me. And on Sunday, I thought that the matter would be settled happily, for Captain Ferrers made me his request, and, though I did not greatly like him, I was about to take it with gratitude, when I found that Mr. Preston's eye was upon me, and knew that he was listening. I dared not, in his hearing, accept, and was forced to tell the Captain, what was indeed very true, that a previous gentleman's offer obliged me, with regret, to decline his. But I was much vexed, and feared that Mr. Preston would so watch me at the ball that I should have no chance of agreeing with a partner there; and so I resolved to throw myself on the kindness of Mr. Godstone. I boldly followed him out, as he was going to his horse on Monday morning. He rode out, generally, from the back

of the house, the road being less crowded, and he loving to ride at a good speed.

"Sir," said I, running out, "may I speak to you?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Godstone, turning with his kindly look, and at once removing his hat. If I should live to a thousand years, I think I should never forget his look, as he stood bareheaded in the sunshine, the light glancing on his light-brown hair, which he wore always unpowdered, and in which, for all his pretence at age, there was not a grey hair, his head bent a little to listen, his hat and whip in his hand, and his long riding cloak hanging loosely from his shoulders. I drew a long breath, and knew not how to begin. The uneasy pawing of his horse warned me that I must not keep him.

"Sir," said I, "you know we are going to Mrs. Courtenay's ball to-night, and Mr. Preston asked me to dance with him, but I thought—I mean—I wished not to dance with him again, and I could give no reason to him, and when he asked me, 'Had someone been beforehand?' I did not deny it. And now I have no partner, and what shall I do? for he will find out that I was promised to no one else; and I had to refuse Captain Ferrers, too, because Mr. Preston was listening. And, oh, sir, will you be so good as to find a partner for me? I do not care who it is."

Mr. Godstone smiled with a smile that laughed

from his eyes as well as his lips, and answered, "If you care so little, would you accept an ancient cavalier?"

"*Anyone* but Mr. Preston."

"Will you dance with me, Mericas?"

I felt my whole heart leap up with joy, and, looking up, I caught his hand, and would have kissed it; but he, holding mine back,

"Nay, Mericas, surely the gentleman, not the lady, has cause, on such an occasion, for gratitude."

Then, bowing, he lifted my fingers to his lips, but scarce touched them, and, looking at me with a face grown grave again, turned away to his horse. I went slowly to the house, but in the doorway paused and looked back. He, too, was looking back. I curtsied, and he, with a bright smile, waved his hat to me, and rode away.

I ran indoors, and flew up to my own room singing for joy. I looked out my dress for the night. I laid this ribbon and that against my face. I resolved that, if I was to have the honour of being Mr. Godstone's partner, I would, if possible, not disgrace his choice. I almost forgave Mr. Preston, since he was the cause of my happiness.

And in the evening, behold! Mr. Godstone was all in a light dress, save, indeed, that his coat was of a dark red, laced with gold. And, beckoning me towards him, he said, with a smile, "Mericas, you see I have had a mind for your sake to outshine even the *all-conquering* Preston; but I see there is

one thing which I have forgotten. Have you never a blue ribbon to tie my hair in the place of this black one?"

To be sure I had, and I hastened to fetch it. He drew back a little from the others, and I tied it, though I could scarce reach to do it with ease. And when it was fastened, I could not but think with admiration of his appearance.

"You may boast of your work, Mericas," said he; "I think I have not worn a bright ribbon in that fashion since I was of your age."

To hear him talk, one might have thought that time to be fifty years past, instead of fifteen; but to look at him, as he looked that night, one might rather have gessed it five.

My life has been, in many ways, a happy one, but I have sometimes thought that that night was its happiest point. We were a cheerful party. Letty was contented, for she was to dance with Mr. Preston. Her mother was happy in her pleasure; I, in the prospect of being Mr. Godstone's partner; and he, I think, in that of my gratification. As we entered the ball room, the ever-watchful Mr. Preston, though he kept, as in duty bound, by his partner, yet let nothing I did escape him. How thankful was I that I had not deferred until now the finding of a partner! I do not think it had entered his mind that Mr. Godstone should dance with me. Certain it is that, when a scraping of fiddles began and Mr. Godstone offered me his

hand, a very blank look of surprise crossed the face of Mr. Preston, and for an instant he forgot his wonted elegance, and rather yielded than offered his hand to Letty. Whether his after reflections soothed him, or angered him the more, I cannot tell, for when once I had taken my place in the dance, I thought of him no more.

Mr. Godstone was like no other partner. His nature shone through his dancing. When he bowed to me, the action was eloquent of reverence; his touch, when he took my hand, meant guardianship. I have said that I was resolved, as far as I might, to do credit to his choice; but this feeling presently died away, and left in its place a sentiment not to be described, but like those passing sweetnesses which have no shape in words—like music in the air, or the perfume of flowers, blown across the darkness when the flowers themselves are hidden. As long as we danced, I thought of nothing else; but after a while, when we were pausing from the dance, I began to fear lest Mr. Godstone might weary of a diversion in which he so seldom cared to join, and his goodness to me become a burden. I ventured to utter this doubt, and to assure him that, if it were so, I desired to dance no more. He, smiling and holding up his finger, as to a child, said, "Confess, Mericas, is it not you who are weary of your partner, and regretful of the prudence which could refuse Mr. Preston?"

"No, indeed, sir," I answered indignantly; "anyone might dance with Mr. Preston; but *you*——" Then, stopping myself, and half laughing to hide how much I was in earnest—"Confess, sir," said I, "in your turn, that you did but put the question in order that I might praise you."

And when I had said this, I paused in amaze at my own boldness, which could thus rally Mr. Godstone. Then it was that, among the many gay groups, I caught sight of a pair coming towards us, whose looks pleased me well—a fair, tall man, on whose arm hung a laughing, dark-eyed girl. I thought, "a pair of happy lovers;" and, in the moment of the thought, I saw that a mirror was before us, and that the figures and faces were Mr. Godstone's and my own. The many groups, the crowded room, Mr. Godstone's unwonted dress had permitted the momentary illusion. But was that indeed ourselves? That rose-tinted, smiling girl, Mericas?—and that young lover, Mr. Godstone. I glanced from the mirror at him, and then around the room. Yes, it was true—he was among his equals here, or rather *first among equals*, as I had heard Mr. Prestou say to Letty, in telling her what every gentleman aspired to be. But ah! Mr. Preston, he who would be first in outward graces should possess also the inner graces of the soul, else is he but a player aping to be a king, whom a moment's real passion will throw out of his part. I dared not lift my eyes again to Mr. Godstone's face. For

a minute or two after, I scarce could speak. It was as if a sudden enchantment had indeed changed us. And, indeed, there was a change. His eye sparkled, his lip laughed. He seemed, for the first time since I had known him, to be happy for his own count, and not because he had made others happy. And I—I know not how—had become his equal.

But alas! the evening was all too soon at an end. Madame Rolandi appeared from the card-table; and Letty, fatigued, but with triumph in her eyes, came up, attended by Mr. Preston.

Madame Rolandi turned on me a cold gaze, and said to her brother, "I fear, Richard, *you* must be weary of an evening spent thus."

He smiled, and answered, "Nay, indeed, Letitia, to own the truth, I have found it but short. I suspect I am scarce as sober-minded as I thought myself."

She put up her lip and turned haughtily from him, though she had been just about putting into his hands her cardinal, that he might enwrap her. She suffered one of the gentlemen who stood by to perform this office in his stead; and he, though I wished he had not, came to assist me. Then, our cloaks and capuchins being on, we were borne home, Madame Rolandi scarce speaking all the way. Letty and I went at once to our apartments; so also did Mr. Preston, but Madame Rolandi detained her brother, and it was not till near ten minutes later

that I heard the rustle of her brocaded silk, as she passed my chamber door. I trembled lest she should come in—and she did pause, but passed on, and I breathed once more. Involuntarily, I listened for Mr. Godstone's step to follow. But, though I was listening for it, yet when I heard it ascending the stairs, I fell a-trembling from head to foot, and held my breath; and when it was out of hearing, sank down in a chair, and knew not what had come to me. The night had almost touched the morning, and though it was summer, a chill air crept in, and made me shiver. I sat with my hands clasped together, and cared not to look into mine own heart. But after awhile, I said, half aloud, "Come let me be true to myself," and I resolved to think freely, now while I was alone, and to learn why, and how, my life was so changed. And in an instant my heart acknowledged its secret, and I knew that I loved, and ever should love, Mr. Godstone.

What passed between Madame Rolandi and her brother I could but guess, but I make no doubt she rebuked him for dancing with me. And he, doubtless, in my defence, must have related to her the cause thereof. For when I went down the next morning I saw that she regarded me with an altered countenance; she scarce replied when I bade her "good morning," and observed Mr. Preston with a watchfulness like that of Argus himself. I hardly dared to lift my eyes, lest I should meet his, and

she suspect us of an understanding. Yet, when I kept them bent down, I dreaded lest she should think I did so from shame. How relieved was I when the breakfast was over! I made a slight pretext for taking my work to my own apartment, and reappeared only when Mr. Preston had gone to visit Lady Mallingford, his sister. I almost wished, greatly as I feared it, that Madame Rolandi would express her displeasure, that I might have the occasion to assure her of my indifference to Mr. Preston. But this she did not do. She merely watched me in silence, with a cold, immovable watchfulness. And the next day, I perceived that Letty had begun to watch me too, and to repulse me when I tried to address her. Only when the gentlemen were present, did they treat me with the semblance of their usual manner. Mr. Preston, I presume, observed that we were watched, for he scarce spoke to me during those two days. But on the afternoon of the second day, when I was about to change my dress, Rebecca having come in to fetch something, and stopping to help me, I put my hand in the pocket of my apron to take out my keys, and found there a paper. I opened it, standing, unsuspicious, before the glass, and at the first glance saw that it was another copy of verses in Mr. Preston's hand, and headed: *To Mericas.*

Much discomposed, I crushed it in my hand without reading further, and, looking up, perceived my own embarrassed face in the glass, and the

curious one of Rebecca peering over my shoulder. And now a foolish perplexity beset me. I knew not what to do with the paper. I was about to slip off the dress and apron which I wore, and I dared not leave it in one of their pockets, or lying in my room, lest Rebecca should seek it out and take it to Madame Rolandi. I could not keep it shut up in my hand till I was clothed in my other gown, and could transfer it to my pocket. I would not destroy it, save in Mr. Preston's presence, for I was resolved he should know I would neither look at it or keep it. And, in my confusion, I did, perhaps a foolish thing. At a moment when I thought Rebecca was not looking, I slipped it into my bosom, meaning to put it in my pocket as soon as I should be alone. Rebecca showed herself far more ready than usual to wait upon me, folding up my morning gown, and flitting about me, with gossip and offers of service. And now, at last, I was going down, but—"Mericas!" called the voice of Madame Rolandi, from her apartment, and on my going thither to her, she gave me some orders for the kitchen, which took me so long to execute that when I returned to the drawing-room, visitors had arrived, and Madame Rolandi, Letty, and Mr. Preston were all there, and Mr. Godstone soon after appeared to dinner.

Madame Rolandi was in high spirits. I had seldom seen her more brilliant, but there was a fire in her eye and an implacability on her lip, which I

well knew announced approaching storm. Mr. Godstone was, that day, obliged to return in the evening to the city, expecting despatches from abroad. He gave us his company, however, until after tea, and then left us. The visitors were intending to proceed to the play; they quitted us, therefore, a little before the hour of that entertainment, Lady Lucy Pentwistle alone excepted, whose aunt was to send the chariot for her. I dreaded to hear the rolling of its wheels, hoping that Mr. Godstone might return before we were left alone, for I had a presentiment of fear, which was, indeed, but too justly to be fulfilled. But Mr. Godstone came not, and the sound of the chariot presently drew near. Lady Lucy rose, and began, half laughing, but not without some real terror, to speak of the daring stopping of a coach in Leicesterfields, the night before. Letty, thereon, to my surprise, exclaimed that she was so little afraid of highwaymen that she would, if she pleased, accompany her, provided that the chariot might return with her. And, turning to Mr. Preston, "Mr. Preston," says she, "will you lend me your pistols, that I may protect Lady Lucy?"

"My pistols, madam," returned Mr. Preston bowing, "are at your service: but, as they are scarce weapons fit for the tender hands of a lady, permit me to add myself to them, and to have the joy of using them for you, should occasion arise."

Letty tossed her head and called him "vain

man ;" but she looked satisfied.

Madame Rolandi went out with them to the house door. I heard the merry laughter and sat trembling. Now would have been the moment to remove the verses to my pocket, but, in truth, I had forgot them, my mind being full of fear of Madame Rolandi. I heard the coach door closed, her last "good night" called to them, then her step. She came in, advanced, and stood before me.

"Mericas," said she, "what paper have you in your bosom?"

Involuntarily I carried my hand thither, and paused.

"Answer me," said she, in a terrible voice.

Then I drew out the paper and gave it her. She looked, she clenched her hand, she called me "*little viper*"—I thought she would have struck me.

"*I* have not read them," said I.

"No, I know you have not—and you shall never read them now," she cried; and she thrust the paper into a candle, and waved it in the air, all burning, and then, when the flame came near to her hand, dropped it, and stamped upon it, and trod it out.

"And you, *you*," she cried, "little, artful, black-faced Papist, to try and steal my Letty's lover. Is this your gratitude for all that has been done for you? But you shall be punished—oh, you shall be punished! Base, intriguing creature! You

shall be sent home in disgrace. You shall inveigle no more rich young Englishmen. You would have liked to be Lady Preston, of Preston Hall, I dare-say. But your arts are discovered; you shall go home to a convent."

"Madam," said I, "madam, hear me."

"No, I will not hear you. What can you say? Can you deny that those verses were in your bosom, and that Mr. Preston wrote them?"

"No, madam, not that; but it was not my doing."

"How, *not your doing?* Did you not put them there?"

"Yes, indeed; but only until I could return them. I meant not to keep them."

She laughed out loud, angrily, and coming close to me, and looking at me with great flaming eyes, "Oh, accomplished designer!" she cried. "No truly. She would not keep them. Nay, Mr. Preston, that would be unbecoming. A lady accepts verses, you know, only from her *acknowledged* admirer. Oh, cunning, cunning!"

I stood amazed. I knew not what to say.

"Yes," she exclaimed; "stand and look at me with an innocent face, if you can—unblushing girl! But I will unmask you. My poor, confiding brother, too—he shall know!—he, who was deluded, and made the mask of your clandestine intrigues. How *dared* you, Mericas, to fool an honourable man like my brother, under his own roof?"

"And how dare *you*, madam," cried I, made suddenly bold by these words, "to accuse me of such an action? 'Tis false—false! I have done nothing that I am ashamed of—nothing that all the world might not know."

"Speak as befits you to your betters, girl," said Madame Rolandi, fiercely, and the habit of a life-long fear awed me again. "And rest assured," she went on, "the world *shall* know of it—all of it. If I had my way, you should leave this house to-night." (I thought of my dear father's words, and thanked Heaven that the house was Mr. Godstone's.) "And mind you, you shall never see Mr. Preston again—never. You have beguiled him once; you shall do so no more, you may depend upon that!"

"Madame Rolandi," said I, "I never have loved Mr. Preston."

"Who speaks of love?" she interrupted. "Love! What immodesty! You tried to entrap him, and men are such fools, that even an insignificant chit like you can catch them. I never supposed you loved him. Preston Hall and a title were baits enough. My brother shall hear of it, I promise you."

"Madam, madam, let me speak to Mr. Godstone; I beseech you, let me explain."

"I warrant you! A soft, easy man like my brother! Have you not deceived him enough already? No, madam," with a low curtsey, "you

shall see no more gentlemen."

"Oh! Madame Rolandi," I cried, bursting into tears, and flinging myself at her feet; "Have you no pity for me? Alone, friendless, motherless! Oh! my troubles are more than I can bear."

And, indeed, I felt as if my heart would break. She drew back a step from me.

"Rise," she said, sternly. "You played your false game, and lost, and you must take the consequence. Don't look to *me* for pity. Rise, girl, I say."

And I rose. I wept no more. My tears seemed frozen. If she would be my enemy, I would harden myself against her. I stood before her, and looked at her, and felt that I hated her. She said more, much more. I scarce heard her. I looked at her, and saw how the violence of her rage disfigured her beauty. Her words passed over me like sounds of the street; only once or twice, when she touched on Mr. Godstone, they became as sounds of the street to one tortured by a racking headache. At last, the chariot wheels were heard,

"Begone," she cried, "begone!" and I thankfully obeyed.

I went up to my own room and there sank down upon the floor, completely exhausted and overwhelmed. Oh, how could she be so cruel, so unwomanly! How could she even *think* the things she had said to me? And this was Mr. Godstone's sister! Good Heavens! what must he have suffered

during all these years; he who loved her. I lay so for some time. Then I rose. I heard voices below. I heard Madame Rolandi laugh, and presently I heard Letty coming upstairs. I opened the door just wide enough to let my voice through.

"Letty!" said I, "Letty!"

But she passed on. Whether she heard me or not, or whether she would not hear me, I cannot tell.

Then I heard Mr. Preston's step coming gaily up the stairs, and the little clink of his sword. By this time it was late; but I had not begun yet to prepare for the night. I could not rest; I moved to and fro uneasily. The time went on. I heard quarter after quarter strike from the clock of St. James's. I knew that Madame Rolandi had not yet gone to her room; that Mr. Godstone was not yet returned. I extinguished my candle, keeping alight only a little wick floating on oil, at which to relume it, if occasion called, and, pushing open my window, leaned out into the hot, still night. "Who knows," thought I, "how long it may still be my lot to look upon this scene?" And presently I heard a quick sound of horse's hoofs; I heard the door of the stable-yard open; and saw, by the light of the lantern which he carried, Mr. Godstone leading in his horse. He was singing to himself as he came, and his voice, though lowered, reached my ears distinctly, the more distinctly that the words were of my own language, and the melody

one which I was accustomed to sing. Words cannot express the emotion which moved my heart as I listened. His face, too, lit by the gleams of the lantern, stirred the inmost recesses of my soul, and I bent out into the shrouding darkness, gazing and hearkening hungrily, for who could tell how soon I might be parted hence, never to see him again? A stream of light flowed from the open door of the house; for a moment he stood revealed in it, then gave his lantern to the groom, and bidding him "Good-night," passed in.

I turned from the window, closed it, and came to my door. Once more I opened that a little. My heart was on the rack. He had gone in. I heard his voice;—he was speaking to his sister—and now, hers. She is telling him. Oh, for courage to go down, to confront her, to tell the whole truth! Oh, how my head throbbed and my heart! The beating of my thoughts in my brain seemed to stop my ears. And yet—oh, that was her voice again—a word or two. Where was she now in her vile tale?

And after a long time, surely they are coming out. Madame Rolandi's long, stiff dress pattered and rustled against the edges of the stairs. She swept along the corridor to her own apartments. And now, stealthily, I opened my door. All was silent. Mr. Godstone was alone in the parlour. Could I bear to let him keep that tale, uncontradicted, in his thoughts all through the hours

of the night? I stole out; noiselessly I drew the door together behind me; step by step, lightly as a ghost, I descended the dark stairs. At half-way down I heard a sound—a chair pushed back. He was moving—he was coming. A kind of terror paralysed me. I would have given worlds to be back once more in the safety of my own room. I felt I must creep into any hole or corner sooner than meet him. Hastily, I drew back into a little half landing close by, where was a window, shaded by curtains, and a statue, standing with a wax light in her hand, to lighten the stairs. Trembling, I blew out her candle, and concealed myself in the shadow of the curtains. Mr. Godstone came out. Forked lightnings from his candle gleamed high on the upper walls, now dwindling, now shooting upward, as he moved. He barred and bolted the door; then he locked the parlour door also; and then I heard his step upon the lower stair, and his spurs clinked as he came. Now again I thought I might have strength to speak to him, if it was only a word. And then he sighed—oh, so deeply—and murmured, "Good Heavens, good Heavens! My poor child!"

And, like an arrow, shot the knowledge to my heart that he was thinking of Letty. I leaned against the wall; but for its support I must have fallen—and then he passed, going up slowly, and I saw him. The light fell on the heads of his silver-mounted pistols shining from the inner

pocket of his riding-coat, and on the handle of his whip and the buckle of his hat as he carried them in his left hand, and on his face, so pale, so sad, so changed from what I had seen it scarce half an hour before. I longed, my very heart ached, to speak to him, but I dared not, and he passed by. And as he passed my door, his step lingered, he sighed deeply once more, and went on with his head bowed down.

The next morning, before I was completely dressed, came Rebecca to me with a message from Madame Rolandi that I was not to go down stairs, my breakfast would be sent me in my apartment. So I sat upstairs and heard the sounds of the house, and, looking from behind the curtains of my window, saw Mr. Godstone ride out. Mr. Preston came out with him, and stood with his hand on the horse's neck, scanning his beauties with a critical eye. Mr. Godstone, I fancied, seemed anxious and disturbed. Mr. Preston much as usual. There could be no private conversation between them, for the groom was close at hand. After a minute or so, Mr. Godstone rode away, and Mr. Preston, before returning to the house, cast a long glance up at my window. But me he did not see, for I was behind the curtain, and had, you may be sure, no mind to show myself. The day wore on; I sat, heavy-hearted, in my solitude, and no creature came near me till Rebecca, with a sour visage, brought me some dinner, which, for very

melancholy, I could scarcely touch. Now, I had writ a note to Letty, and this, with tears in my eyes, I gave Rebecca. I know not now its precise contents, but I besought her that I might go to her, or that she would come to me, that I might explain all. I reminded her how many years we had loved each other, and begged her not to believe it possible that I could, in a few short months, have become capable of wronging my friend. I asked her when, in all my life, I had showed a nature equal to so black a treachery as I was now accused of, and finished by solemnly declaring—not that I had never loved Mr. Preston, since that phrase so much displeased Madame Rolandi—but that I had never for an instant desired his attentions or thought of accepting them, but, on the other hand, had done all I could to discourage them, as Mr. Preston, if he were that man of honour for whom he passed, would certainly confess.

Trembling, I awaited the issue. A sharp knock came to my door, and Madame Rolandi's voice bade me imperiously "Open." I did so. Her face was pale with anger; she held in her hand my letter, which, without a word, she cast down at my feet. Then, rolling on me her great dark eyes, "Dare not again," said she, "to address the suffering angel whom you have so wronged." And, turning her back upon me, and holding aside her dress, lest it should touch the paper on the

floor, she went out, and left me standing as if transformed to stone. And again I was left alone until Rebecca brought me a cup of tea and some muffins. Of her I asked "How was Miss Rolandi?" For her mother's words of "*suffering angel*" made me fear, knowing the violence of her disposition, that she might be ill. And so indeed it was, for Rebecca answered, with an austere frown, that her young lady was very ill, that she had had a kind of convulsion, and then had well nigh fainted, but that she was now lying down. "And Mr. Preston," she added malignantly—little guessing how much relief she gave me—"lingered about her door, seeming, poor young gentleman, half heart-broken, and begging to be allowed to do something for her." Poor Letty! Indeed, I could scarce blame her for being angry with me. Ah! if she would only have suffered me to see her, how easily might I have set at rest her uneasiness. But that might not be. And, indeed, I am not sure that, even if I had seen her, she would have given me back her confidence. Her old love for me had waned slowly ever since her arrival in England; I had seen a thousand instances of it. And now, as I thought of all that had come upon me, I began to think that my coming had been ill for them all—ill, most of all for me. Heaven, I thought, places us, surely, in the post most fitted for us, and binds us with ties of blood to those whom we should cleave to; and now, too well I find, in this strange

land, how weak are the bonds which we make for ourselves, and how fruitful of misery the attempt to fill a place to which we were not born. Had I stayed in my own country, I had escaped all this woe, and this other, heavier woe, which if Madame Rolandi but guessed, she would hate me tenfold more. And Letty would have had her wooing in peace, undisturbed, and Mr. Godstone—nay, I could not think of Mr. Godstone's face. And then I thought how, if I had remained in my own country, I might, ere this, have been made a nun, and I shuddered. Ah, and that dislike of a holy life, had it not come, too, of living among those who held not the true faith? And yet, what lay before me now but a convent! And while I revolved these melancholy thoughts, came Rebecca, and told me that I was to go down and speak to Mr. Godstone in the parlour.

My limbs trembled beneath me as I went, and I felt that I was of an ashy paleness. Oh! if he should look at me with eyes like his sister's!

I came to the door—I scarce could push it open. Mr. Godstone came towards me and led me across the room to the window. His eyes rested with compassion on my face, and as we stood, he kept my hand a moment in his. Then, "My sister," said he, "has told me what has passed."

"And do you, indeed, sir," I asked, in a kind of desperation, "believe that I have acted so unworthily?"

He covered his eyes with his hand, "Oh, Mericas," said he, and turned away from me. I thought he would not look upon me. My heart seemed to turn cold within me. But, dropping his hand, and turning on me a pale face, he said, "Be sure of this. I will never believe that you *meant* to act unworthily; but Mericas, why did you not tell me all this before? Could you not have trusted that I would be just to you?"

Ay, indeed, why had I not? Then would all have been well, and he would not have looked at me with those eyes of sorrowful doubt.

"Indeed, sir," I answered, "I wish that I had done so. I have done nothing which you might not have known. My father told me to take counsel of you as I would of him. But, indeed, I know—I thought, I should distress you—I tried to discourage Mr. Preston; indeed, I did not think that this would come of it. Oh, sir, let me be sent away; but tell me that you believe I have done all this harm unintendingly."

"Yes, I believe that," said Mr. Godstone, with a sigh. He paced the room once or twice with agitated steps. Then, pausing by me and taking my hand, "Mericas," said he, "do you *wish* to return to Lisbon?"

"Oh, sir," cried I, and my tears interrupted me. Then said he, very gently, but with a kind of solemnity which made me fear he was displeased, "Proceed my child; you cannot think that I will

judge you harshly. You do not, then, desire to return to your father's house?"

"No, sir," I replied. "But I see that it must be so. Miss Rolandi no longer loves me; her mother is angry with me, and I am become a burden to *you*."

He shook his head at that, and said, briefly, "No." Then, looking at me with eyes that seemed to pierce me through, "'Tis true, Mericas, that you cannot remain here." (I felt my tears rising again at the words, and saw, or fancied I did so, a displeasure in his face as he perceived them.) "But you have not failed to remind me that I stand in your father's place, and when a daughter quits her father's roof, 'tis that she may exchange it for a husband's." He paused. I did not speak; I could not. I felt a premonition that he was about to propose some husband, by taking whom I might set at rest the jealous alarms of Miss Rolandi. I waited with terror for his words. Once more he took my hand, which he had held but for a moment, and said, "Mericas, you have said that you felt to me as to a father." (Surely I had not said so, but since he chose so to interpret my words, I could make no denial.) "Forgive me, now, if I take a father's privilege, and ask you"—he paused, he hesitated, he scarce seemed to know how to frame his question, and at last, "Have you seen," he asked, "in this house, the man whom you would be willing to think of as a husband?"

Oh, how cruel was the question. I stood before him, unable to reply. The self-accusing blood flowed in my cheeks, and reddened my very arms and my hands to my finger tips. A faint sound like a groan came from his lips. I could not look at him. My eyelids were weighed down by an unutterable weight of shame. At last I said—and no human being can ever guess with how much pain—"It is no one who will ever love me."

The slow words, dropped one by one, seemed like the utterance of a fate, foresaying my destiny. My only comfort lay in his supreme modesty, which gave me hope that he would not guess the truth. Better he should suppose me caught by the fashionable air of the *all-conquering* Preston; and from his next words, I had hopes that this was, indeed, his fear. "'Twill be best, I think," he said, sadly, "that you should leave this house at once—best for you, too, my poor child. I fear you have not been very happy here."

Not happy!

"I have never been so happy before, and I fear I never shall be again," I said, softly.

He sighed once more, and told me there was a kind of convent at Hammersmith where I could lodge for a while, until a ship was ready to convey me to Portugal. He further said that Madame Rolandi had proposed that I should travel under the charge of Mr. Diaz, but that he was resolved to entrust me to no care but his own, and to see me

safe into my father's hands, himself.

"You are very good, sir," I faltered. "You are too good; I am unworthy of so much trouble."

"My child," he said, very gently, "will you not give me leave to try and find a way of keeping you in England, and giving you a happier home than mine, from which you are driven out?"

I heard him with indifference. I did not guess *whose* was the home in his thoughts. I understood, indeed, that he had in his mind some project of a marriage for me, but I was too unhappy, and too hopeless, to care much what became of me.

I said, "You are very good, sir. Believe me I am not ungrateful for all your kindness."

My voice trembled, and Mr. Godstone said, "Nay, my dear, I never imagined that."

He went on to speak of my journey to Hammersmith. I found that my removal was to be made as soon as possible, and I guessed that Madame Rolandi was urgent for it. I told him that I could be ready, if he pleased, the next day, and he, approving, promised to take me, the next day, himself. And on the following afternoon, Mr. Godstone conducted me in a coach to Hammersmith, and I took leave of the house in Pall Mall, little thinking ever to enter it again. Rebecca had assisted me to put up a few necessaries, the rest of my clothes were to follow in a few days.

Madame and Miss Rolandi neither again saw me, nor took farewell of me; yet did I not leave

the house without a good wish for my future from any of its inhabitants. As I was making my last preparations, a frightened tap came to my door.

"Who is there?" cried I, for I had a fear that Mr. Preston might try to see or speak with me.

"'Tis I, miss, Hannah."

I hastened, at that, to open the door. Hannah was the under-housemaid, a good, honest, country girl, whose love I had won by bandaging her hand, when it had been scalded, some months before.

"What is it, Hannah?" said I, as I opened the door. I saw that her face and eyes were all swelled and reddened with tears.

"Oh, Miss Mericas," she said, "are you really going away? Oh, miss, I wish you could stay!"

"So do I, Hannah," I answered, with a shaking voice.

"Then, 'tis true, as Rebecca says, that you are to be sent away, and 'tis a wicked, wicked thing. This house will be a miserable place when you are gone; you are the one that keeps everything straight; and if you *are* a Papist and a foreigner, you are a deal fitter to be an angel than some that knows better. And, any way, miss, I felt I must come and say '*Good bye*' to you, and tell you to cheer up, whatever they may say to you, for everybody will love *you* wherever you go, and 'tis their loss, not yours."

And bursting into tears, she put her apron to her eyes and sobbed aloud. As for me, I felt as

if the saints had sent her to me to soften the weight of affliction at my heart, and, laying my head upon her shoulder, I wept without restraint. But soon we heard Rebecca coming, and she hastened to leave me. Rebecca, however, met her, and I heard her questioning her whence she came. Alas! how unfortunate was I, thus to involve my only friend in trouble! Rebecca came to inform me that Mr. Godstone waited. I hastened to descend, and we set out.

His manner was, as ever, kind and gentle; he betrayed no anger, but a cloudy sadness seemed to hang about him, in spite of all his efforts to dispel it. But he seemed anxious to distract my thoughts from the gloomy topics which might well employ them, telling me the names of the places we passed, and the histories of such as possessed any. For myself, when I lost sight of the house which during the last days had been so melancholy a prison to me, I felt, through all my sorrow, a blissful relief in being free from the crushing weight of Madame Rolandi's displeasure, and out of reach of her eyes.

I related to Mr. Godstone how Hannah had come to me, and begged his favour towards her if Madame Rolandi should be angry with her. He told me in his kindest tone that she should not be the worse for it. We reached the convent, and the Superior received me with so great a sweetness that 'twas clear her knowledge of me came through

Mr. Godstone, and not through Madame Rolandi. Then Mr. Godstone, having recommended me very particularly to her care, took his leave, promising, however, that he would come soon to visit me again.

I remained for some weeks in this peaceful rest. I was weighed down by sorrow, but the hours of quiet work and meditation, which were allowed me, brought me balm, and the gentle sisters behaved with great complaisance to me.

But, though it would ill become me to say a word against the life of these truly pious and excellent women, my abode among them did but more strongly convince me that the convent was not my vocation.

On the fourth day of my stay, Mr. Godstone came to see me. The Superior brought me down to him, then, withdrawing, left us together. Mr. Godstone's face seemed to speak a mind occupied by very varying emotions, as if a hidden joy mingled with some feeling of concern, both being painted on a ground of melancholy. He took my hand, bent, and just touched my forehead with his lips, then asked whether I was well and happy.

"As much of both," I answered, "as I could look for." He next asked whether I had received my clothes. I answered "Yes," and thanked him.

His eyes, all this time, had wandered restlessly hither and thither, with an uneasiness which I had never before observed in him.

Without looking at me—"Mericas," said he, suddenly, "I have not been unmindful of you all this time. You know I told you I would do what I could for your happiness. I have kept my promise. I have spoken to Preston of you."

"To Mr. Preston!" cried I.

"Yes. Letty's jealousies shall be no bar. Nay, Mericas, hear me out. I put aside my anger, for I was angry with him, and I let him know—Ned Preston know—that if he honestly preferred you, I would suffer no reproach to be made to him concerning Letty. I did that for you, Mericas."

"Oh, sir," I cried, wringing my hands, "why did you so? What must Mr. Preston think of me? When did I give either him or you cause to think that I entertained such views? How low, how scheming, a creature must you deem me!"

"Nay," he answered, "It was nothing more than natural that a pretty girl and a fine young man should prefer each other to all the rest of the world."

I was so angry and confused that I could scarce find words of fitting patience to express myself.

"And what," I cried, "said Mr. Preston to this offer?"

"I will leave him to put that into what shape he will, himself," Mr. Godstone answered, with some severity. "It is enough that you can see him, here, at any time you choose to fix."

"See him!" I exclaimed, "See Mr. Preston!

Was I not sent hither expressly that I might see him no more? Surely he cannot suppose—surely *you* cannot dream, that I *desire* to see Mr. Preston

"I thought," said Mr. Godstone—"I certainly thought—Did you not all but confess that you loved him?"

"No," I cried out; "No, sir, never!"

Mr. Godstone started a step back, and I feared that in my anger and surprise I had answered him with unbecoming warmth. He looked down as if in reflection, then again fixed on me that penetrating gaze before which I felt myself shrink abashed.

"Are you sure, Mericas," he asked, "that you do not love Mr. Preston?"

I answered petulantly, that I hated Mr. Preston.

"Hate is sometimes but the other side of love," Mr. Godstone said, still looking at me.

"Not with me, sir, I assure you; or, indeed, it might perhaps be so, for, in fact, I do *not hate* Mr. Preston. He is completely indifferent to me; only hateful as the cause of my disgrace with those whom I love best in the world."

"If that be so," said Mr. Godstone, "I will no longer scruple to tell you Preston's answer as plainly as he gave it me. He owned, then, that it was only the difference in fortune which kept him constant to Letty; that he had distinguished you from the very first; that he could not (these were his words) make himself the town talk by marrying

a girl without a penny, but that, if you had any fortune, he would gladly have married you."

"But I would never have married him, sir; never —never!"

And I wept. I was not, at that moment, sufficiently mistress of myself to gather, what after reflection made plain, that Mr. Godstone must have proposed to give me some fortune, since Mr. Preston's addresses were to have gone on. I wept that Mr. Godstone should have thought me capable of using my position in his house to lay a snare for a wealthy lover. I looked up, after an instant or so, meaning to put this feeling into words; but the sight of his face inspired me with such amaze that I forgot my purpose. He had come quite close to me, and was looking at me with a smile, tender, almost to rapture, while his eyes seemed absolutely to glow with emotion. And how was my surprise redoubled by his words.

"Mericas, my dear child, my own love!" And he took my astonished hands in his and kissed first one and then the other.

"Sir," said I, "sir—"

I could say no more. I scarce knew what was befalling me.

Then Mr. Godstone recovering himself and resuming the natural dignity which belonged to him, spoke in words never to be effaced from my memory. "Forgive me, Mericas, if my uncontrollable emotion has broken bounds for a

moment. Heaven only knows what I have suffered since my jealousy of Preston revealed to me how wholly my heart was yours. Can you, my sweet girl, love one whom you have thought of *as a father?* Ah, Mericas, you little know how you stung me there! Can you trust youth to a man so grave and old as I—nay, not so old, neither, but in seeming—but whose love has grown with your life, and will cease only with his?"

And before I could guess his intention, he was kneeling at my feet, and the eyes, before whose gaze my own had fallen, were looking up at me from below.

"Oh, Mr. Godstone, rise, rise! That place is mine, not yours. Oh, how can I answer—how can I thank you?"

I paused. The sudden emotion, following upon so many shocks, had turned me faint. The floor seemed to come up towards me. For a moment I feared that I should fall. But he, springing to his feet, put his arms about me, and I wept out the remainder of my tears upon his breast.

And now, when I was somewhat more composed, "There is one thing, Mericas," said he—"do not reply to me if the question pains you—yet I cannot forbear to put it. You told me you loved one *who would never love you.* Was that one—I scarce dare hope it—I?"

"You, you! who should it have been else?"

"And how long? Oh, to think how near I was

to missing you after all! But who would have thought, who ever would have guessed, that there was this St. Martin's summer for me? You have not loved me long, Mericas?"

"Indeed, I do not know. It could scarce have been before I saw you; but I do not know when the change came. I know—"

"Why do you stop?"

"I know when I first knew it. But when, sir, did you first think of me? And, oh! how could you dream that I could think of Mr. Preston?"

At this thought, I raised my head, and looked up.

He smiled, and loosing my hair, which had entwined itself in a button of his coat. "Is not love blind, my dear? But, come, let us sit down and talk of what is to be done next. For surely, now, Mericas, there must be no going back to Portugal."

"Oh," said I, "how strange!" For I thought of my father's words to me that I should make no marriage without Mr. Godstone's consent. I told him this, and

"Then, my Mericas," said he, "you can feel no doubt of your father's approval, nor need to wait for his sanction."

"But, oh!" said I, "what will Madame Rolandi say? Will she not think worse of me than ever? How will she ever bear to see me—or I her?" I added, trembling.

"You shall not see her," said he. "She shall know nothing as yet. We will wait till her anger has passed over." He appeared to consider, then looking up, "My dear," said he, "why should not everyone suppose that you are returned to Lisbon, as proposed, and that I have sailed with you? I will fetch you away from here, as was intended, but, instead of going to the ship, I will take you to the Fleet, where we can be married privately."

He paused, suddenly remembering my religion for the first time, but presently continued. "I had forgot. There must be a second marriage, according to the Roman Catholic form: but that can doubtless be easily contrived. And then we will go to some retired place in the country, where we can live in peace until it is time for me to *return from Lisbon*. Does the plan please you, Mericas?"

I answered that it pleased me entirely, for I cannot express the dread which I felt of appearing before Madame Rolandi as her brother's bride. I dreaded, too, to expose him for my sake to further vexation, and I knew how completely to his taste would be a sojourn, away from all cares, in some peaceful, country spot. And for myself, I think the thought of Eden can scarcely have been sweeter to Eve.

And so, weeks passed on. Mr. Godstone, I suppose, bore my refusal to Mr. Preston, who was scarce very heart-broken, since he resumed his wooing of Miss Rolandi in so much earnest that

the marriage was agreed upon, and only deferred till Mr. Godstone should *return from Lisbon*. Great, indeed, he told me, were their efforts to dissuade him, under these new circumstances, from accompanying me; but he, as he said, showed himself adamant. I cannot but wonder, for my own part, that Madame Rolandi's suspicions were not aroused by so unusual a persistence in his own choice. She was, however, so well assured that her brother had no thought of marrying, and so firmly convinced af my designs upon Mr. Preston, that the idea of danger did not enter her mind.

Thus, on one fine, hot day, the 30th of July, 1749, Mr Godstone fetched me away from the convent, the superior commending me to the care of the saints, and the sisters wishing me good fortune and smooth weather on my long voyage. And, indeed, I was on the threshold of a longer voyage than they knew, but without much fear, since Mr. Godstone was to be my pilot. I stepped into the coach, he followed, and it rolled away. A few days before, he had brought me an English Prayer Book, desiring me that I would read the marriage-service, and see whether there was aught in it that went against my faith. And I, studying it with attention, told him, now, that I had done so, and found in it nothing but what seemed holy, wise, and solemn, and could with all my heart assent to.

"That is well," said he, "and I am glad that you have read it over in quiet, beforehand, for I fear

the place and manner with which we must content ourselves will scarce be so solemn as I could wish it, but as lawful, my dearest, as if we were to be married in St. Paul's, with the ringing of all the bells in London."

And then, for a little space, we sat silent, and the heavy coach jolted on between the green hedgerows, and through the bushes we had glimpses of corn-fields, and heard the reapers sharpen their sickle, and their voices as they spoke, and I, though I would not for worlds have grieved Mr. Godstone by acknowledging it, yet could not help wishing that I might have had some woman with me, on this day of all in my life.

Ah! if Madame Rolandi had been the sister he deserved, if I might but have had Letty's kiss on this day! But, indeed, I felt that I was ungrateful even to have such thoughts while he sat there beside me, his grave face lightened by a sweet content; and should scarce have written them, here, but for that which followed, showing that even my love-fancies had not reached the height of his goodness.

He told me that we were to go to an inn at the foot of Snow Hill, where we were to discharge the coach, deposit my luggage, and meet Mr. Diaz; that, as soon as it began to grow dusk, we should go into the precincts of the Fleet, Mr. Diaz accompanying us, and there be married; that on our return to the inn, a Catholic priest should be

in waiting to perform the service according to the rites of that faith ; and that, early next morning we should proceed to a village on the coast of Devonshire.

When we reached the inn, Mr. Diaz was awaiting us, his kind face puckered by innumerable wrinkles of self-importance.

"He and yourself," said Mr. Godstone to me, "are the only persons in London who know of my intention, and I will not say which I think likely first to reveal it."

I wondered a little that he should think me likely to reveal it, since to whom could I do so, even if I wished, but Mr. Diaz now whispering in his ear, he nodded, and turning to me, "Mericas," said he "here is someone wishes to see you."

"Oh, no," cried I, clinging to his arm.

"Our steps, so far, will bear tracking," said Mr. Godstone. "She may come in."

And now I shook indeed, for if it was a woman, who could it be but Madame Rolandi ?

Imagine my surprise when Mr. Diaz ushered in my good Hannah !

I ran to her, and took her hand.

"Oh, sir," said I, "how good of you."

"Will you never leave calling me 'sir,' Mericas?" said Mr. Godstone in my ear ; then, in a higher tone, "I told Hannah that if she had a mind to see Miss Armento again, she might see her, here, this afternoon, for the last time, and perhaps

Miss Armento, before she parted from her for ever, might recommend her to a mistress not unlike herself."

"Oh, sir," said I, looking up at him with grateful eyes.

"But he, drawing me a little aside, "May we trust her? You know best."

"Indeed, I believe so," I answered.

He nodded, and coming to her, said, solemnly, "Hannah, I am going to put a great trust in you. Can you promise for this young lady's sake, to keep it faithfully? She is so alone here that you are the only friend who has come to say '*good bye*' to her. Will you promise never to betray the secret that she will tell you?"

"Indeed, and I will, sir," she replied, curtsying, "and I only wish I could serve her some way to keep her in England, instead of going back to marry some of them *Papistes* across the sea."

I suppose it is exactly in solemn moments that the smallest thing will set us a-laughing by its incongruity. Certainly, I never saw Mr. Godstone laugh so much as he did when Hannah made this denunciation of my countrymen, and I, infected by his example, laughed, too, till we could both scarce speak, and Hannah looked on in wonder, as well she might.

But at last, controlling himself, "That is the very thing, Hannah," says he, "which I wish you to do. And now you shall go upstairs with Miss

Armento, and she shall tell what she would have you to do."

And so my good Hannah followed me upstairs, and when we had shut all the doors close, I told her all, and we wept together.

And the first thing when I came down again, Mr. Godstone began to rally me, because I had betrayed our secret to the first person I met.

And now, the summer twilight beginning to fall, we started towards the Fleet. Mr. Godstone, before starting, took off his watch and seals, and bade me and Hannah carry no money, which made me think we were going to a strange place to be married. He and Mr. Diaz knew our road thoroughly, and, he drawing my arm through his, and Mr. Diaz conducting the abashed Hannah, we set out. I had on a hood which concealed my face; Mr. Godstone had pulled his hat over his eyes and drawn the collar of his coat high up around his face, yet I doubted whether his height and his unpowdered hair would not make him easily recognisable should we meet any person who knew him. But it seems this was not so, for in crossing Holborn, one of his own clerks passed us, but deeming him already sailed for Portugal, never guessed at his person, but meeting Mr. Diaz, held him in talk for near five minutes, asking who Hannah was, and how he came to be there. And Mr. Diaz explained that Hannah had been in Madame Rolandi's service, and that he had con-

ducted her to take farewell of me. On which the clerk, as Hannah with much indignation told me, said that Madame Rolandi had done well to send me home, for I was far too pretty to be safe. And then he left them, and they hastened to follow us, who were in some alarm at their lingering. We turned through a narrow lane called, if I remember rightly, *Seacoal Lane*, into Fleet Lane, which was a narrow, noisy street, hot and stifling. Strange-looking men set upon us, bawling. "This way to the *Hand and Pen*, sir," "This way for Dr. Gaynham's shop—" and one, at our heels, "I know the shop to suit your honour—wax candles, and a real archdeacon, and a clerk who had his training at St. Paul's—all for a guinea."

And Mr. Diaz, I perceived, was if possible. more beset than we, while Hannah, in alarm, clung to his arm in a most loving manner.

Mr. Godstone strode through these buzzing shoals without reply, and we entered a house which was a little less ill-looking than the most. I was glad enough to escape from the noisy and drunken crowd of men and women. A whole gang of sailors went by, almost all drunk, and with half-a-score of loud-voiced women hanging about them. Drunken songs were heard issuing from almost all the neighbouring houses.

"Oh, Lord! sir," said Hannah, "where have you brought us to?"

She looked round the room, which, indeed, was

not over clean, with scorn.

I, however, felt no uneasiness with my hand in Mr. Godstone's. And next to Mr. Godstone, I trusted Mr. Diaz, who had been my father's friend since both were boys.

"'Tis not a beautiful place, truly," said Mr. Godstone, who, in entering, had struck his head against the low doorway, "but Sir James Fortescue and Lady Grace Cleveland were married in this very room no later than last Sunday, and so I think it may serve for us."

"Very well, indeed," said I, for I was resolved to pain him by no show of fear or misliking. And then came in one whom I supposed to be the clergyman, for he was robed in full canonicals; his linen, however, was rather black than white, his cassock greasy, his face red, and his eyes bleared. An odour of gin and tobacco came with him, and a lad, carrying a flaring candle in a battered candlestick, followed.

I looked at this person in amaze, and clasped Mr. Godstone's hand the tighter.

"Mr. Tyler, I believe?" said Mr. Godstone.

"The same, sir, at your service," the clergyman replied.

To my surprise, his tone was by no means vulgar.

He motioned to the boy to set down the candle, and then, taking his stand behind the table, and leaning his two hands upon it. "Which couple,"

says he, "am I to marry first?"

"This lady and myself," said Mr. Godstone; "no other."

Then laying five guineas upon the table, "We are ready, sir; I beg you to proceed."

He led me forward to the table, and leaving his hold of my hand, we stood apart at its two sides. Hannah stood behind me; Mr. Diaz at Mr. Godstone's left hand. Mr. Godstone had hastily written on a leaf of paper, which he handed now to the clergyman, saying, "These are the names."

He took it, and read it over, muttering, "Richard and Mericas; Richard and Mericas—but these are only the Christian names."

"You need no more," Mr. Godstone replied, "for this portion of the service."

Then the other opened a shabby-looking book, and, clearing his throat with a "hem! hem!" began.

Mr. Godstone had laid open also that Prayer Book which he had given me, and his eyes followed, as if to be sure that the service was duly performed. And when almost in his first question the priest would have departed from the ordinance, omitting the holy names in which, as the book prescribed, we should give our promise, Mr. Godstone, lifting his eyes upon him, bade him, sternly, "Read the service of the Church, sir;" and pushed towards him his own book.

At which the other, looking up in surprise, obeyed; and soiled, degraded, drink-shaken as he was read yet those high and holy words in a deep and solemn voice, and deep silence lay on the shabby room, and the shouts, from below and without, seemed but to hallow this one spot of earnest silence more. Truly, it is the soul that makes the chapel, and I have never felt that our marriage was the less, but rather the more solemn for its surroundings. And when all was ended, and the priest, pronouncing that we were man and wife, closed his book, we stood one moment looking at each other, silent. Mr. Godstone, then, asked for a certificate, and the priest, gave him a sheet of vellum, adorned above with the king's arms, and dipping a pen in ink, asked for our names. Mr. Godstone dictated them to him, leaning over to watch that all was correctly writ. Then, taking the pen, he added a last line, and held it to me, that I should read.

The certificate—it lies before me now, ran thus:

: At the Clasped Hands, Fleet-lane, on the 30th day of July, 1749, Richard Godstone, Bach. of the parish of St. James's, London and Mericas Armento, Spin. of the parish of Lisbon. pro. Jno. Tyler. Certified as according to the laws of this realm, and the ordinance of the Church.

Mr. Godstone had written at the foot:

Witnesses, A Diaz and Hannah Sturgess.

The priest, then, turning to Mr. Godstone, said, "Ah, sir, if all my customers were such as you

and your lady, I should earn a hard living with a better conscience."

I know not what reply Mr. Godstone might have given; at that moment a woman came, breathless, to the door, crying, "Mr. Tyler, here is a pair in haste to be married at our house, and Dr. Jones is so far drunk that we cannot rouse him. Quick, quick, or they will be gone to the archdeacon's.

And he, snatching up his book, stumbled down the stairs, leaving us to follow as we pleased.

And so we came out again into the brawling streets, where it was now quite dark, and coming to our inn, found a Catholic priest awaiting us, who was a man of a very different stamp from Mr. Tyler. So I delivered my ring again to my husband, and we were married again, in a grave and serious manner, according to the faith of my own country; Hannah and Mr. Diaz present as before. And the ceremony over, Mr. Godstone turned to me, and in Portuguese said, "All happiness to the bride," and took my face between his hands and kissed me, which he had never done before, all the time that I was alone and dependent on his protection. And so, indeed, we took farewell, as he had said to Hannah, of Mericas Armento, and sitting down to supper, for it was now past nine, Mr. Diaz and he drank together to Mericas Godstone.

Of the three happy months which followed I scarce know how to speak, except to say that they

were altogether cloudless. We dwelt in a cottage that overlooked the sea. Without, was a neat garden, with a summer-house grown over with ivy and honeysuckle; within, were clean rooms smelling sweet of lavender; a little kitchen, where Hannah reigned happy and undisturbed; a parlour where, on one side the window, stood a harpsichord, my guitar lying upon it; and on the other a shelf of books, from which my husband, who loved reading, but for many years had been forced by want of time almost wholly to deny himself the indulgence, delighted to read to me. Often, we took a little boat and spent long days on the blue bay, under a sky of August, so blue that, sometimes, I almost dreamed myself back once more in the bay of my own Lisbon. Often, too, we wandered among the reddening copses and red sandy rocks, inland. Richard had been born and bred in the country, not thirty miles from this very spot, and in his eyes I read first how powerful is the hold which such a boyhood keeps on the after years of a man. And from him, then, I learned first to love the beauty of the English country. But, ah! in trying to tell all the peaceful life of those days, I do but make a flat narration, and miss that which made them what they were—the sweet nature of my husband. I have watched many men and many marriages since then, and I know that not one woman in a thousand is blest as I was. And the thousandth woman, alas! too seldom knows her

treasure, but abusing it, makes her husband and herself unhappy. We had, too, the inestimable advantage that we knew each other as a new-made wife and husband seldom can, and had that foundation of true friendship at the root of our love, on which it were well if more weddings could be based.

But, alas! these happy months were all too soon over. Letty and her mother wrote often; their letters being duly sent to Mr. Diaz for transmission, with his business correspondence, to Lisbon, and by him as duly sent on to Richard in Devonshire. They constantly urged his speedy return, and he, with grief, perceived that he must comply. But what, now, was to become of me? He still thought it well to defer the acknowledgement of our marriage till Letty's wedding should be over; and I, coward as I was, was only thankful for the respite. He established me, for the present, at Greenwich, my trusty Hannah being, of course, with me.

Here we lodged in the house of an elderly couple, and I passed for Mrs. Thompson, whose husband was gone to India, and who had no friends in England save an uncle, who from time to time came to visit her. And so, for some months, things lingered on. Now one pretext, now another, arose for keeping the condition of affairs concealed—the most trifling cause will serve as a reason for doing that to which we secretly incline, and both Richard and I

could not but dread his sister's violence, when she should know the truth.

And now, some six months after our marriage arose a sad stroke. My husband's nephew, Mr. Charles Godstone, who, as I have said, was left in Lisbon, had defrauded the firm of a large sum of money, and disappeared. It was but too plain that Richard must, this time, go to Lisbon in good earnest. Sad was our leave-taking. He offered, if I desired, that Madame Rolandi should be informed of our marriage that I might be under her protection, but I shuddered at the thought, and, on the contrary, was thankful that I might live hidden from her during his absence. But how did I fear the chances of the sea, and of the land also, and of the many misfortunes which might arise to sunder us for ever! How did I long that I might accompany him. But that could not be. 'Twas mid-winter, the call was urgent, and Richard would not hear of my braving the discomforts, and perhaps dangers, of so long a journey at that inclement season.

"And so" said I, "you will have me be but a fair-weather wife to you."

"My dear," said Richard, in that tone whose tenderness had never changed, "I am a rough, strong man, and I scarce notice cold or heat; but if you were with me, I should feel every wind that made you shiver, blow through my heart. I should never see you pale, but I should blame my own selfishness, which brought you with me to suffer,

rather than let you be safe out of my sight. And if I were to lose you, Mericas—for you are but frail!"

He shook his head, and I besought him no more. He lamented much that he had no portrait of me, and made me promise that I would sit to a miniature painter, and that Mr. Diaz should send him the picture with his other packets.

"And here," said he, putting into my hand a red case, "is one which may remind you of me, though it shows a man whom you never saw."

I opened it. It was a miniature of himself taken some few years earlier then the time when I saw him first, but, save that it had a happier, keener look, scarce different from my *St. George*. I said so, and he, over my shoulder, looked down at it with the strange, mournful, wondering smile with which a man looks on a memento of his boyhood.

"I scarce thought," said he, "ever to give it to my wife thus."

"Was it done," I asked, "for Miss Preston?"

"It was. Did my sister tell you of her? Yes; she sent it back."

I looked up at him. Did that memory hunt him still?

He, lifting his eyes from the portrait, met mine.

"Mericas," said he, gently. "God has dealt better with me than I would have done with myself. And you, my child, do not look at me with those reproachful eyes. You have the man's love—she but had the boy's."

And I was satisfied, and ashamed of my own jealous doubt.

We parted. I cannot live the pain over again in writing of it. He went, and I and Hannah were left lonely at Greenwich. And during the sad summer of his absence, was born my little daughter. And Hannah has always laughed at me. because my first thought was whether her eyes would be blue. And they were blue indeed, and when the soft hair began to clothe her tiny head, it was golden as the sunshine that shone when she was born.

Within a few days of that time it was, that my poor father died, and Richard's letter with news of death crossed Hannah's with the news of birth. It was some comfort to me, since I could not be there, that Richard was with him at the end, and brought me his last words.

My little one grew, and was strong, and large of her age, and fair, and I found comfort in her, and in my husband's letters, which came regularly to me through Mr. Diaz. Whenever a ship had come in with letters, this faithful friend would, that very evening, bring them, himself, to Greenwich, regarding neither the badness of the weather nor the insecurity of the roads.

And at last, after near a twelvemonth's absence, my dear husband was given back to me, and I had the joy of seeing my child in her father's arms. He came to me straight from his ship, having come ashore at Greenwich, no less impatient for our meet-

ing than I. It was decided that I should remove to London. Richard declared that he could not bear to have me at so great a distance, and he took a house for me in Mortimer-street, Cavendish-square, which, being a new neighbourhood, open behind to the fields, and but few houses yet built, was, in reality, more retired than a country village; but now, like all the other outskirts, beginning to be swallowed up in this ever-growing town; and here in great privacy, I continued to dwell for another six or seven months.

Our marriage was still not revealed to Madame Rolandi. It is always easy to defer that which may be done at any time, and the year had by no means made our task seem easier. I did, indeed, sometimes wish that, since it must be one day done, it should be done at once, but I would not urge it on Richard.

All his life, he had been made to follow the desires of those about him; his wife, at least, I was resolved, should never use his gentleness to make him follow hers. And I had, too, some pleasure (as I believe had he) in the very secrecy of our lives—its concealment seemed to give our happiness an added charm. But now circumstances, though for a shorter time, once more compelled our parting. Madame Rolandi was gone to Bath, there to meet her daughter and Mr. Preston, and at the end of three weeks, it was arranged, Richard should follow her thither, and, after a week's stay, accompany her on her return. I parted from him with sorrow indeed, but not with fear. I little guessed what lay before us.

Now, on the fourth day, in the evening, when it was already quite dark, near to ten o'clock, as well as I can remember, and of a wet, windy night, we were alarmed by a violent knocking at the door. Being only women in the house, so lonely a situation, near the fields, and robberies so bold and frequent, our doors and windows were always barred up and bolted as soon as it began to grow dusk. Hannah, at this unwonted knocking, came running to me in the parlour.

"Oh! ma'am," says she, "surely I had better not open. It can be no good, at this time of night. It will be some drunken man who has mistook his way."

"Nay Hannah," I said, "it may be some one has met with some accident. Do you open the upper parlour window, and look out."

She did so, crying, "Who are you? What do you want?"

"Oh, Mrs. Hannah," said the well-known voice of Mr. Diaz, "come down and let me in. I am wet through, and I must see your mistress."

But before she could draw in her head, I had run down, unfastened the heavy bar, and drawn back the great bolts of the door.

"Come in, Mr. Diaz, come in," I cried. "Have you letters from my husband?"

But I was all of a tremble, for I had not expected letters so soon. The Bath coach could scarce have returned an hour before, and I feared I knew not

what. I bade him come into the kitchen, where there was still a fire, for he was all dripping with wet. And, then, seeing his face by the light, I perceived that it was much disturbed and troubled.

"Oh, Mr. Diaz," I cried out. "What has happened?"

I sunk into a chair, and Hannah, who had now come down, came to my side, thinking, as she told me after, that I should faint.

"He is alive, my dear lady; he is alive," said Mr. Diaz.

Scarce could the words '*he is dead*' have given me a greater shock. The very mention of his life as something to tell seemed to bring so near the chance of death.

"The coach was attacked by highwaymen a few miles out of Bath," said Mr. Diaz, "and there was some fighting, Mr. Godstone among the foremost to defend himself and his fellow-passengers, and he was wounded by a pistol shot. Nay, dear madam, I trust there is no danger; only time needed: he is lying at the Bear, at Bath. Madame Rolandi is with him. I feared you might chance to hear of the accident from some other source. Come, my dear lady, indeed you must not be so fearful."

"I am a coward," said I, "Tell me more particulars, Mr. Diaz."

"I know no more, madam; the message told me merely the facts."

"Oh, then, he was well enough to send a message; did he not send to me?"

"It was Madame Rolandi who sent the message," Mr. Diaz answered, in some confusion. "Doubtless Mr. Godstone charged her with it."

I said no more. Hannah, after fetching him some wine, stood holding his steaming overcoat to the fire. He said that he must at once return to the city. Yet did he not go, but stood moving uneasily to and fro.

"Madam," says he at last, as if he could contain the words no longer, "have you your marriage certificate?"

"No," said I, in wonder, "my husband has it." Then all at once, guessing his thought, "In the name of all the saints," I cried, springing up, "tell me the truth, Mr. Diaz. Is my husband in danger? Is he like to die?"

"I hope not. I hope not."

"But 'tis likely—oh! is it likely?"

"Indeed, I *know not*, madam, and that is the truth. I know only that he was wounded, that they carried him to the Bear, and that he lived."

"Was that all the message? Why were you sent to, Mr. Diaz?"

"The message, madam, the message," said Mr. Diaz, twisting his hands, and looking this way and that,—"you know Madame Rolandi is fanciful about physicians—'twas that I should send Sir James Grove."

"And is he gone?"

"He rode to-night."

"To-night—so urgent—Oh Richard—"

I felt my knees fail under me, and all my blood run back upon my heart. I heard Hannah's voice, as if through a thick cloud. "She's going." I sank back into the chair from which I had risen. Then, for an instant, all was blank. But I called my forces back; these might be the last moments of my husband's life, and should I waste them in fainting? And lifting myself up, to their surprise and my own, I spoke quite composedly, and felt myself calm, and mistress of myself, and in no way inclined to weep. I said that I must set out, that very moment, for Bath; that I must get a chaise at any price, and if I had to walk all over London for it. Mr. Diaz, wringing his hands, besought me to hear reason. The roads were unsafe. I should certainly be stopped. I should have to wait for horses, and even if I arrived without accident (which he said was well nigh impossible, I should reach Bath later than if I waited till to-morrow morning, when I might go by the Machine, which accomplished the journey in two days. "You know, madam," said he, "how much it would distress your husband to know you travelling alone, in a chaise, and at night."

"Sir James Grove has gone," said I, "why cannot his wife go?"

"Sir James rides his own horse, and is armed. Indeed, madam, *it must not be.*"

And so I yielded, since he made it clear that by

waiting I should arrive the sooner; and he promised to see me to the coach himself, the next morning.

I scarce know what happened through the rest of that most miserable night. I only remember that, again and again, when I was well nigh mad with grief, I cast myself down beside my little one's bed, and watched her fair, fair little cheek and golden hair, and so got strength to live through another hour's agony. And once she stirred, and, lifting her eyelids, looked at me quietly out of her clear blue eyes, then broke into a dimpling smile, and put up her soft hands to my face. Then drawing my treasure softly to me, I bent down my face above her, and wept as if I were weeping my very life away.

And slowly, slowly the dawn broke, and the day came, in which I could start to go to my husband. Oh, that day! How slowly moved the coach, how endless were the lines of hedgerows, turning now to the same green as when Richard took me to Hammersmith. And the talk among my fellow passengers was of how the coach had been attacked on its last journey, and the coachman killed, and a gentleman badly wounded.

"Will he die, sir, do you think?" I asked of an old gentleman who had spoken.

"How can I tell, miss? I know nothing but that he was shot, and that he did not die there."

And I said no more. When we stopped for the

night, and while we waited in a great room for supper, the talk began again.

"They were not common highwaymen," said a young gentleman, who had travelled outside, and professed to have his news from the coachman. *They* would scarce have dared to stop the Machine. They were encouraged by a young gentleman (of Bristol, 'twas said), who hoped, in the confusion, to carry off a young lady, a great heiress, with whom he was in love. But the tall gentleman (as he called Richard), hearing the lady shriek, had gone to her assistance, and the two had fought, and the young gentleman, being hurt in his sword-arm, had called out to his men, 'Shoot him!' and one of them—cowards as they were—did so; but help coming, and the young lady clinging to her protector, they were obliged to go off unsatisfied after all.

"And what was the gentleman's name who was wounded?" asked a lady.

He told her *Gadsden*, and belonging to Bath. which made me doubt the truth of the rest of his tale.

I had not thought to close my eyes that night, but the weariness and the many hours of travel had so spent my strength that I slept, but kept starting awake again, dreaming that I had seen Richard dead, or that Madame Rolandi was angry with me, and telling me, over and over again, that she would not let me come to him to see him. And, then, as morning came, I dreamed that the

coach was gone without me, which so affrighted me that I started up and slept no more.

Once more the coach started, and the slow hours wore on. I sat, leant back in my place, given up to sickening thoughts. First among them lay the terrible anguish of fear lest I might be too late. Again and again, the image of Madame Rolandi would present itself, coming forward with proud wonder in her eyes to ask *What did I here?*

As the light of the evening began to spread low over the landscape, a passenger leaned down from outside to call to us. "'Twas here the coach was attacked; you can see the marks,"

For, indeed, the grass was all trodden, and the soft ground scarred. Everybody looked out but I —I could not. And now all began to grow eager, and to look for known places, and at last the Machine drew up before the Bear. 'Twas almost dark. There was a great bustle, but, looking up, my eye fell on a figure which made me at once hope and fear. A gentleman, in the dress of a physician, was coming down the broad central staircase. I flew up to him.

"Sir, have you come from Mr. Godstone?"

He looked at me with some surprise, and replied, "Yes, madam?"

"Oh, tell me," said I, and there stopped; but he gave no reply till I had forced from myself the question, "Will he live?"

"I trust so; I trust so—Oh yes, I trust so,

madam. Are you, then, the young lady whom he saved ?"

I shook my head, and pointing up the staircase, "Which is his room ?"

Drawing himself up, "Nay madam," says he.

"Will you drive me mad ? which room, sir, which room ?" I cried, with a fury which I had not known to belong to my nature. I had stationed myself before him, he could not pass me, he looked alarmed ; I doubt he thought me crazed.

"The first room on the left," says he, in a small voice, and I, running by him, went up.

One moment I stood with my fingers on the door handle. Madame Rolandi, Letty, they were all nothing to me, now. I felt strong to sweep them all aside, but the thought of seeing him made me weak. Softly, I opened the door. The growing twilight filled the room. I saw that there were people in it, that this was not Richard's room, that a door stood open into another beyond.

"Where is my husband ?" said I.

And as I came in at the door, this strange thing came upon me ; time became endless, and every minute seemed age-long. I had lived half a life before the face of Mr. Preston, like a face recognised in a crowd, came up before me, with wonder in his eyes. He had not yet spoken when the rustle of a woman's dress stirred, Madame Rolandi came swiftly to me from the inner room, and in a voice, hushed, astonished, joyful, whispered, "Mericas, thank Heaven you are come."

I stood as turned to stone, or in a dream and feeling it a dream. Suddenly, from the inner room a voice, sharper, thinner, but going to my heart like my child's cry, came, asking.

"What is it, Letitia?"

Then, unexpectedly, my strength came to an end, and without a word, I dropped, fainting, at their feet.

When my senses returned, I was lying on Madame Rolandi's bed; Letty and she were beside me. They told me, in answer to my first whispered question, that there was every hope, now, that Richard's wound was less serious than at first apprehended; that, when Madame Rolandi sent her message to Mr. Diaz, he was lying unconscious, but from the time he came to himself, his thoughts had been all of me. That he had dictated to Mr. Preston all the particulars of our marriage, and had bidden them send for me, which they had done at once, but were none the less amazed to see me, since it was impossible I should have followed so speedily. And Letty told me, afterwards, that he had called her mother to him, and making her sit by him on the edge of his bed, had said, "If ever you loved me, or your own child, Letitia, be a sister to my wife when she comes, and a friend to her and her child, if I die."

And that, with tears running down her face, she had answered, "Oh, Richard, do you suppose I could be angry with her *now?*"

"And does he know," I asked, "that I am here?"

They told me, Not yet; they had waited till I should be recovered sufficiently to follow the announcement immediately. And I, at once declaring that I was sufficiently recovered, they presently let me go back.

I waited in the outer room, standing close to the door of the other, and holding Letty's hand. Her husband stood by us, his face scarce less anxious than ours. Whether 'twas his marriage, or the being older by two years, had changed him, or the sobering effect of his grief, I know not, but he appeared to me much more manly and simple than in former times.

Madame Rolandi began to speak, within.

"Perhaps, brother, Mericas might arrive to-night."

"Impossible, Letitia, unless she could fly."

"Nay, but you know, Mr. Diaz might have sent to her to tell her, and if so, she might have come by the Machine to-night."

There was a quick rustle, as if he raised himself in bed. "Go and ask, Letitia, go and ask."

Then her voice, entreating him to rest still; then his—

"Why did you give me a hope?" and, with a deep sigh, "Not until this time to-morrow. Oh, if she knew how I wanted her!"

I could keep back no longer. I moved forward,

but Mr. Preston held me firmly by the arm, and afterwards I was grateful to him.

"Dick," said Madame Rolandi's voice (it was the first time I ever heard her call him by that name and the last), "she's here."

As the words were spoken, Mr. Preston relaxed his hold, and I went in.

The moment, the light, the precise degree of sound from the street, the room, the bed, are all stamped on my brain; but when I try to recall them, piece by piece, I can separate nothing but my husband's eyes—so keen, so large, so strangely blue, and fixed upon me with a very hunger. If death had sundered us, I think he would have met me, after, with such a look. I laid my face beside his; there was not a word spoken between us.

Madame Rolandi stood with her back towards us, wiping away, one by one, the tears that ran down her face.

"Letitia," said Richard.

She drew near. He, taking her hand in the one of his which was not disabled, laid it against mine. Our two hands clasped together, and his longer hand came without, and closed upon them both.

And thus that revelation which, for two years we had so feared, passed almost unheeded in the shadow of the greater fear. Slowly, the greater fear, too, drew away, and Richard rose up, looking, as his sister had said once before, like his own ghost. But before that time, came another change

for which we had not looked. The young lady whom Richard had defended (for the tale was true enough) was Miss Casildon, who was about to marry Lord Pembury, and was, indeed, a great heiress in the right of her mother, who had been many years dead. Sir Frederick Casildon, her father, was an old admirer (so he said) of Madame Rolandi, before she went to Portugal. He came at once to thank Richard for his protection of Miss Casildon, and the acquaintance was renewed. As Richard recovered, Madame Rolandi resumed those gaieties which her care for him had interrupted. How happy for us were those times, resembling almost our peaceful abode in Devonshire! I almost dreaded their coming to an end, and so, I am sure, although he said no word, did Richard. Indeed, the thought could not but be oppressive, of resuming a life in London which might be perilously apt to resemble the old days before our marriage. Yet neither of us saw what lay clear before us, not although Madame Rolandi, many times in a day, dropped words of Sir Frederick's admiration, and Sir Frederick's loneliness, now that his daughter was married and gone to Italy, and his elegance, and his fine house. For we had so long been used to the number of her admirers—though, indeed, that was, now, somewhat less than formerly.

One evening, however, Madame Rolandi returned, having walked with Letty in the town, and, sitting down by us, said, "Brother, I have something of

importance to communicate to you—which I think it may not be hard for you to guess."

But neither Richard nor I could frame a conjecture and gazed on one another with wonder, and well nigh with alarm.

Then said Madame Rolandi, in a slightly higher tone, "I did think, Richard, that I should never have left you to marry—you know well how often I have refused to do so. But now—you have taken another companion. No, I do not blame you ; 'tis natural in a man to wish a wife of his own. Only this ; I intend to follow your example, and I have given my promise to Sir Frederick, this afternoon."

I saw the gathering anxiety lift like a cloud, from Richard's brow.

"My dear Letitia," he exclaimed, "I rejoice to hear it. I rejoice most heartily. 'Tis the very life for which you are fitted, and Sir Frederick is almost the only man to whom I could be glad to give you up. I wish you joy, my Lady Casildon."

Madame Rolandi smiled, aud letting fall a glance of inquiring triumph my way, seemed to ask : "What say *you* to this ?"

I, feeling in my heart a selfish joy, scarce dared to meet her eye.

"Richard," said she, her smile growing, "your wife is jealous that I shall be *my lady*."

And she touched my cheek, and laughed.

I smiled, but did not contradict her. She could pardon me that. She might not so easily have

pardoned the inner thankfulness of my heart.

And so Madame Rolandi was married with great triumph to Sir Frederick Casildon, and entered upon the life for which, as Richard had truly said, she was most fitted ; and my husband and I went home together to that house in Pall Mall, which was my first home in England ; dear as the scene of my first love, dearer still as the home of my most happy marriage, the scene of my children's childhood, and where, when my time comes, I hope to die.

AN ARTIST.

Il y là une certaine nostalgie de l'idéal.

AN ARTIST.

A young artist came up, through moon-lit field-ways, to a solitary-standing country house. The full beauty of a summer night was around him, too full and glorious for the soul to embrace it all. Above was a calm ocean of dark blue sky, broken by shimmering islets of soft-edged cloud, and below was the fairyland of moonlight. The very fluctuations of light and shade would have been sufficient joy for an artist. Even a man in whom all personal hope was dead could hardly have called the world evil, on such a night as this. To this young man, radiant with hope, and gifted with all an artist's keen sense of outward beauty, the earth was a paradise. He came to a little garden gate, lifted its latch without needing to look down for it, and passed through a thicket of low trees and of bushes

towards the house. On a space of grass, lying beneath the side windows, he paused and looked up. A French window was standing open, shedding a square of yellow light. A light iron balcony and a short flight of steps gave access to the garden. Within the room, a woman's voice was singing, not loudly nor continuously, but in little broken snatches. Presently the song broke off; a slight, graceful figure, coming to the window, showed itself black against the light within, and a murmuring voice whispered to the darkness "I wonder why he does not come."

Then the young man, from the shadow where he stood, called, softly "Margaret!"

She stepped out quickly upon the balcony.

"Oh, Will, at last."

He was close to the balustrade as soon as she, standing just below her and seeing the moonlight on her face. After the first moment, he drew back a little, and looking at her, said, "I might paint you, now, for Juliet."

"With no need to hide my Romeo," she answered, stretching out a white hand across the iron bar. The balcony was so low that, when he was standing by it, her hand rested on his shoulder. For a moment or two they hardly spoke.

"And have you been painting all the afternoon?" she asked, by and by.

"No, not all. The light changed and I just lay idle, taking in, and learning more than any work

could have taught me. Oh, the loveliness of the green leaves against the sky! What a pain it is, sometimes, to be so happy."

"Happier, then, than you are now?" the girl asked with a little touch of reproach in her voice.

"No, my dear, no, indeed—only quieter and more able to taste the exact flavour of my happiness. How can you think that I could ever be happier away from you? It is the thought of you that makes the world so beautiful. But come down, Margaret; don't let us talk with a barrier of balcony between us. Come down to your favourite seat at the end of the garden, where we can see the moonlight lying on all the hills."

She came down, and they moved between the trees, arm in arm, a black figure and a white.

"The moonlight is like love," said he, looking up with a sudden smile, to the sky. "It casts a new light upon all the common, daily things of life. It alters all the appearance of the world. And yet there's another side that the world can never see."

She smiled softly with a sweet, well satisfied smile, and said "I sometimes think, Will, you might have been a poet if you liked, and not an artist."

"And is a poet, then, not an artist too? No, dear, what poetry I have came from you. Six months ago I never saw anything in the world but prose. I was as matter-of-fact as an alderman."

She shook her head, and made a little gesture of disbelief.

"I half wish you had been one," she went on. "I should have been so proud of you."

"What, are words a nobler medium, do you think, than painting?"

"Well, more people understand them; and a book goes farther than a picture can. I want *everybody* to know and appreciate you, Will."

"It you know me, and love me, I care very little about the rest," the young man answered, with his eyes upon hers. "Success is but a little thing after all."

They had come, by this, to the seat of which he had spoken, and sat down, now, side-by-side, and hand-in-hand. They looked out in silence upon the white world before them, and their thoughts ran parallel. In hers dwelt visions of success and triumph for him, she at his side, aiding, warning, restraining, guiding his fiery zeal into practical and reasonable paths; in his, the delight of toil in the noblest line of art, the uplifting of constant ever-growing aspiration, supported by a sympathetic, all-comprehending love. Alas, that it should be possible for parallel lines to lie so near together, and yet impossible that they should ever meet and coalesce.

"I wonder whether you will grow ambitious, by-and-by," she said, presently, when for a moment or so, she had been watching his intent face in silence.

"Am I not ambitious?" he asked, turning towards her with a slow radiant smile. "I think I am. It seems to me that I dream, night and day, of doing something great. Only, when you love anything very much, you are absorbed in it—you can't think of it as a sort of stepping-stone to personal advancement, any more than I can marry you, thinking to myself what a good model I am providing for the education of my eye."

She laughed lightly, pleased by that little recurrence to the personal.

"I should not paint anything worth painting if I could think, while I was at work, of what I should make by it. One must work for love's sake. All the rest soon comes to be so petty. What does the chatter of the newspapers matter? The thing is, to paint the best that is in oneself. To have had large prices for his pictures is not what a man will care about, when he comes to look back upon his life. Ah, no, but to feel that one has done one's utmost in a service of love."

"How fond you are of that art of yours," said she.

"And are you sorry for it?"

"No—only sometimes I almost think you care more for it than you do for me."

"Never; listen, let me see what I can find to tell you what you and art are like."

He paused a little, and then said: "Art is like the air I breathe. There could be no life without

it. It is with me through everything, and always."

"Why, what is left for Margaret to be?" she said, looking down.

Margaret is the sunshine that makes, not perhaps all life, but certainly all beauty, and warmth, and colour. I have only known the whole beauty of art since I knew you, and if I lost you now—I suppose I should go on living—but all the sunshine would go out of my life for ever."

"Would it, Will? It never shall go out."

"I am afraid, sometimes," said he, holding her hands and looking rather sadly, into her face.

"Not that I shall change, Will. Don't say that you ever think I shall change."

"Never when I am with you."

"You must never think it at all. Look at me and listen to me, Will. I can't put it into words as you do, but I shall never leave off loving you, never."

They kissed each other, and her eyes were bright with tears.

"Why should you think that?" she said again, reproachfully still.

"Our lives are so unlike. You live here among all the peace and sweetness of the country, your life is like a poem. Everything round you is beautiful, and calm, and undisturbed. I can't imagine you in my dusty, ill-kept rooms in London, among the noise, and struggles, and bad tobacco

smoke of our rough, art-student life."

"Oh, I would dust your rooms for you, and make them clean, and bright, and you should smoke good tobacco—if you must smoke—and I would cure you gently of your rough ways. But I don't know what they are. It seems to me that you are the gentlest person I know. You must be quick and get on, Will, so that we may be married, and that golden time may come. I should not like to marry a very precise, and neat, and prudent man; there would be nothing for me to do for him."

"There will be plenty to do for me; I forget all about everything when I am at work—everything except you."

"But, Will, you *must* get on, you know. I should not like to be poor; I should not like you to be poor; I mean to have a right to be proud of my husband."

"You dear little manager, you are just like Martha, careful about all those external things."

"Well, did it not take Martha and Mary both to make a complete household? I shall make friends for you, and give pleasant dinners, and take care that you wear nice coats, and have your hair cut more than once in six months, and you shall not have to trouble yourself about any of those outer things at all. Only, you must not set yourself not to get on, you know, Will, because that would be wrong."

"My dear Margaret, I am not so fond of poverty.

Poverty means much thought taken away to the consideration of mere outward, ignoble needs. It means the want of models and the want of a free mind—the greatest need of all for good work."

"Oh, Will, and you have to put up with it all."

"Not now. I consider myself, now, to be almost rich. I could be content if I knew I might go on earning every year only a little more."

"I can't bear to hear you say you would be content. It is not fair to yourself, no, not to your work, William. Now listen, and let me preach to you. An artist paints to beautify the world."

"No, no," the young man interrupted, "he paints because he must."

"Well, he must, because his art is beautiful. And the more people he can make his picture reach the better he is doing his work, don't you think so?"

"Yes, perhaps."

"And how is that to be done but by his getting a name, and by many people knowing him? What do you suppose I should look out for, if I went to the Academy? Why, your pictures of course. And so would all your friends. Oh, I wish I could be in London—I wish my aunt, Lady Walsh, would ask me to go to her. But she is always abroad, and she never troubles herself about me. No, I shall not go to live in London until you take me."

"If you knew how sweet the country is, you would not want to be in London, Margaret."

"And if you knew," she answered, "how dull the country is, when you are away, you would not wonder that I long to be away too. But don't let us talk of that—you must not go till my portrait is finished, and there are many mornings' work to do to it yet. And your afternoon picture is not done. Oh, you will not be able to go away for a long time yet."

As she spoke, she shivered.

"You are growing cold," said he, anxiously. "We must not sit still any longer."

They rose, but paused yet a moment, looking out across the soft, silvery landscape. And while they paused, quite silent, the nightingale broke suddenly into song behind them. Slowly they moved up the dark garden path.

"Ah, if a man could only paint it, music and all," murmured he.

As they came nearer to the house an elderly lady stepped into the balcony, and looked out towards the direction in which they were coming.

"Are you coming in, you children?" she asked in a gentle, careful voice, "the dews are falling, and Margaret has only thin boots and no shawl."

"We are coming in, Auntie," said Margaret, "and we have not walked upon the grass."

She sprang lightly up the steps, and they went into the brightly lighted room.

Presently, music floated out into the evening air. Then voices sounded, and low laughter. Later, when

the moon had already travelled far in the dark sky, the young man came out, and passed homeward, through the whitened fields. He lifted up his face to the sky, with a keen smile of hope and delight. Who, in this wide world of loveliness, was happier than he? For whom shone a brighter light of hope? For love, as he had said, was like the light of the moon, and all the world was glorified.

II.

William Askerdale had been labouring for some years upon imaginative art-work, and had begun to make his name known in a modest and gradual way. His pictures were spoken of in high terms by the few competent critics, and passed without notice by the many superficial. The Academicians hung his productions in unobtrusive corners, or not at all, and the dealers had nothing to say to him. One season, however, he exhibited a little still-life group—which had been to him nothing but a preliminary study for the accessories of a classical picture—and a fashionable critic proclaimed it typical, and complete in itself, and a noble example of art for art, and a fashionable art-patron bought it and gave the young painter a commission for a com-

panion group. And in the next year, the critics and the patrons looked eagerly for more vases, and bas-reliefs and harmonious perfections of imitation. But behold, the new favourite's principal work was a 'Portrait of Miss Margaret Morrison.' The Academicians had hung it on the line, this time, and for the first few days of the exhibition, it was possible to enjoy its beauties at ease. After that, a crowd surrounded it and the lovely face could only be seen by glimpses between the hats and bonnets of the throng. Two little exquisitely graceful landscape studies of wood scenery were hung out of the way, as usual, and few people went to look after them. They sold, and that was all. But the portrait was everybody's theme of talk. It began to be asked who Miss Margaret Morrison was, and how it came that no one had discovered her before. And towards the middle of the summer, curiosity was satisfied. A certain Lady Walsh, who spent much of her time abroad and was not much known beyond her own quiet set, appeared, one evening, at an 'at home' accompanied by a graceful, golden-haired young woman whom she introduced as "my niece, Miss Margaret Morrison." A perceptible flutter ran through the room, and the hostess at once introduced Miss Morrison to the most distinguished of her guests. Margaret, fresh from the life of a country village, where the rector's wife and the lady of the manor had patronized her, found herself lifted suddenly into a sort of royalty. Society awoke to the

existence of Lady Walsh. Invitations poured upon her. It seemed the ambition of every man and woman in London to have spoken to Miss Morrison and to be in a position to report to friends in the country that she was, or was not, as beautiful as her portrait. The young lady herself accepted all this homage very pleasantly. She had a little composed manner which it pleased her admirers to call queenly, she was never awkward or confused, she walked and danced with peculiar grace, sang in tune, and never, in her most elated moments, became loud or undignified. Lady Walsh had indeed reason to be well satisfied with her niece in every respect but one. Margaret had been allowed by that unwise guardian, her old-maid aunt, Miss Morrison, to promise herself in marriage to young Mr. Askerdale, the artist. Lady Walsh set herself, with quiet persistence, to free her niece from what she described to herself in her own mind as an entanglement. She had drawn from these provoking lovers a promise that the engagement should, for the present, be kept private, and that was as much as, for the first season, she dared to attempt. The mere influence of this new life would probably do more than any act of hers. She took Margaret, in the autumn, to stay at various country-houses, and in various fashionable resorts; then, in the very bleakest and least inviting season of the new year, suffered her to return for six weeks to Miss Morrison in the country. These six months had borne their fruit;

Margaret had grown strange to all the ways of her old home; the village society was dull and commonplace; the butterfly could not go back and be a caterpillar again. And Miss Morrison's assumption that she would, as a matter of course, marry William, vexed her. She meant to marry William, of course she did, but of late she had not been accustomed to be reminded of their bond, and the reminder seemed to savour of reproach. She came back to London, feeling a little bitterness against William. She had come, by this time, to perceive an element of sacrifice in her marriage with a rising artist. The sacrifice was to be made, but one desired that there should be no failure in William's recognition of it. It was surely enough that he had her promise; he had no right to hint dissatisfaction at her mode of life.

He, all this time, had been hard at work. Commissions for portraits had come to him in numbers; his beloved, long planned and deeply studied classic picture had to be set aside, to make room for them. But this, he told himself, was only for a time. Soon, he would be able to afford to give up portraiture, to marry Margaret, and to return to his 'Electra.' But, in the meanwhile, these portraits, to be finished for the Academy, divided him almost completely from his betrothed bride. His daylight hours were filled with work; in the evening, she was never to be found alone; there was, in fact, less serious communication between them than when

they were a hundred miles apart, and wrote long letters to each other, every week. And when they did meet, there was no longer union of hopes and interests between them. Moreover, William became jealous of those happier, wealthy men who were free to see her at all hours of the day, and his jealousy took the form of gloom. Margaret, floating leisurely on the current of an easily graceful, luxurious life found its only cloudy hours those which she spent in her lover's company. The prospect of poverty and bareness seemed more and more repellent. William, himself, began to feel that the love which should have been his greatest joy was becoming his torment. At last, one day, Lady Walsh received him, and explained, in a smooth and suave way, that she thought it was his duty to release Margaret from an engagement made under circumstances so extremely different.

"Does Margaret wish it?" William asked.

Lady Walsh replied, speaking sweetly and with a slightly superior smile, that a young girl would hardly confess such a wish. Still she knew her niece, she observed that something weighed upon her spirits; her health was suffering; she, herself, was morally certain that her engagement had become an unwelcome fetter. She said much more, all equally indefinite, and equally discomposing. When William asked whether she thought that Margaret had ceased to love him, she answered in a vague but significant way, that young girls so

often did not know their own minds, they often fancied themselves in love with the first lover who presented himself—nothing was more common. Then she hinted at the sacrifice of prospects, just indicated a want of generosity on his part, and a sense of compulsion on Margaret's.

"Perhaps you are right," the young man answered quietly, and with a good deal of unaffected dignity. "I won her consent under different circumstances, that is true. I meant it to hold for ever, and I thought she meant the same, but I would not dream of holding her to a promise that she no longer wished to keep. I will write to her and tell her that the decision is as much in her hands now as ever."

He wrote, and Margaret as she read the letter, turned red and white, and tears came into her eyes. Indignation, sympathy, pity, remorse, something too of relief, a whole tumult of conflicting emotion was in her heart. She wept over it. Then she read it again, and asked herself what she should do? She had began to feel a certain sense of disobedience and guiltiness in her aunt's eyes and the eyes of those who made her new world, in continuing to love William. She knew that, to their minds, it would be far more fit and praiseworthy if she should marry some wealthy and perhaps titled man. There was a certain Sir Frederick Brackenridge, for instance, whose attentions to her were very marked. He was rich,

amiable—as far as she could judge—was called clever, and was looked upon, by Lady Walsh and all her friends, as the most desirable husband whom a girl could win. Her head was a little dizzy with the sudden change of view that had been presented to her. Yet, in her heart of hearts, if she could only have stood aside from the whirl, and looked quietly into it, lay a deep foundation of unchanged affection. She never, for a moment, placed Sir Frederick above William, but she had come to think that he might perhaps be the fitter husband for her. And with the peculiar unreasonableness that belongs to love, she resented William's perception of this opinion. He wrote to her :

"When you gave me your promise, you knew but few other men, you had not the range of choice which your life with Lady Walsh has given you since; you may have found now, that there are others more capable of making you happy than I. When I am alone and look back on the past, I tell myself that division between us is impossible ; but when I am with you, I feel only too clearly, that the division is in some measure there. I feel that the present and the past are quite unlike, and I fear, in spite of myself, that your feelings have changed as much as your circumstances."

"He has no right to think that," she said to herself angrily.

And she wrote a short and cold little reply, telling him that since he was so conscious of a

change in their relation, it was indeed well that their engagement should cease. And then she added a fierce little postscript, bidding him remember that he, not she, had made the first break between them. The letter was sent and repented of within an hour. Then she began to hope that he would come to see her, and to assure her that he desired to make no break. For two or three days, her heart stood still at every knock or ring. But he never came, and her mood like that of the imprisoned Arabian spirit, began to be changed by length of time, from gentleness to wrath. It was nearly a fortnight before they met again. It was at a garden party, where she had no expectation of seeing him, for he seldom deserted his work by daylight. Surely, he must have come in the hope of seeing her. They would come face to face, and in the first words, all would be right. But when they met, some perverse instinct of pride and bashfulness had possession of both; neither would speak a word that might seem like the first advance. Margaret went home, to weep a little in solitude and to take a resolution that William should see her engrossed by Sir Frederick Brackenridge, next time they happened to meet. William, on his part, returned, fierce and sad, to his studio, and finding there the friend who shared it with him, gave him to understand that the name of frailty was woman, and that art was the only thing in the world worth bestowing a second thought upon.

It was about a week later that this same friend of William's—Mr. Lewis Austin—was at work, one morning, alone in the studio, when a knock at the door disturbed him. Going to open it, he found his sister, Mrs. Trevor, a brisk and bright-eyed little matron.

"Oh, Lewis, are you alone?" asked she, looking in, dubiously, at the studio.

"Yes, quite; but what's the matter? Is anything wrong with Trevor?"

"Should I be here," she asked, indignantly, "if there were? No, it's about Miss Morrison. She is here."

Her brother's face darkened, and he said, briefly, "Askerdale is not here; she can go home again." Then, after a moment, "Why did you bring her to torment him?"

"Hush!" said she, "you don't understand. It is all that aunt of hers."

"Is it Lady Walsh who is to marry Sir Frederick Brackenridge?"

"Oh, Lewis, don't be tiresome. She is here, and so worried, she does not know what to do. She says she only wants to hear him speak. The truth is she is as deep in love with Mr. Askerdale as she can be, but they have so flattered her, and advised, and persuaded her that she does not know what to do. Her aunt got a sort of promise out of her that she would marry this man. He is to come and see her this afternoon; and now she hesitates."

"Hesitates, does she? Let her come up and look at her own picture hanging there. You had better bring her up. He has only gone to the frame-maker's, and he will be back in a few minutes."

"And find her on the stairs," said Mrs. Trevor, lifting her hands and eyebrows. "Well, I don't know—perhaps that might be the best thing for both of them."

"Bring her up," said Austin, hopeful, perhaps, of his own eloquence on his friend's behalf.

In another minute Margaret was in the room. Her usual composure was quite disturbed. She was breathless and agitated; in the first moment flushed, then pale. She came in, doubtfully, half-suspecting that William might be here, after all. The first thing that met her eyes was her own portrait, hung low, as an artist hangs a picture, on the wall.

"Come in, Miss Morrison, he is not here," said Austin, in a conciliatory tone, his resentment disarmed by her appearance of emotion.

"Ah," she exclaimed, hardly seeming to hear him, "there's my portrait."

Austin drew his sister a little back, whispering, "Let her look at it. It says more than we can do."

Margaret stood looking at it and drawing her breath quickly. Before her memory rose up the still, sunny room, the greenness beyond the open

window, the chirping of the birds, the intent face of her lover, her own calm, utter content. When she turned round, her face was quite pale. She glanced at the others, coloured a little, and began to speak hastily.

"And what a dusty place! I did not think a studio was quite as bad as this."

"I have no doubt he would have brightened it up, if he had known you were coming," Austin replied, rather sourly. The emotion on which he had reckoned seemed rather transitory, and he saw that his sister was smiling.

"Mr. Austin," said Margaret, turning suddenly upon him. "You are not deceiving me? He is not here? He does not know?—you have not told him?"

She looked round, suspiciously, upon the many screens, easels and hangings which might, indeed, have sufficed to ambush a whole theatrical army.

"You might have known him, if not me, better than to ask it—No," Austin answered.

"Yes," she said, quite meekly, "I might have known him. But I am so beset. Everybody seems to lay traps for me. I don't know what to do."

She shut her eyes for a moment—to keep back tears, Austin fancied. But when she reopened them, she went on speaking in a hard fixed tone, looking round the room while she spoke.

"Well, I am here—for the last time, I suppose. No, I don't think I was born to be a poor man's

wife; I might be a good lady of title, perhaps."

She broke off, suddenly, and going towards a picture standing on an easel, asked, "Oh what's this? How dreadful!"

"It is Askerdale's 'Electra,' the best thing he has done yet."

She stood looking at the unfinished picture—the tragic, shadowy face, ghastly in its want of completed colouring.

"But nobody would buy this," said she, "surely he would do better to paint things more modern and more pleasing."

"Perhaps Raphael's friends thought so," said Austin, with a little smile.

"Is he coming in soon, did you say?" she asked next, turning away from 'Electra.' Her restless uncertain mood was very noticeable and very unlike anything that Austin had ever seen in her before. Was it only coquetry, he asked himself, or something more?

"I think so," he answered. "Do you want to wait for him?"

"No—that is, yes. Oh help me, Mr. Austin, I came—I don't know why I came. I want to see him and to hear him—to know how much he really cares, and yet not pledge myself. If I might hide myself here somewhere with your sister—behind one of these screens, or somewhere—and if you would tell him—"

She stopped short, colouring up again like a shy school-girl.

"That you are here?" Austin suggested.

"Oh no, no—but about Sir Frederick. Oh, don't you understand? I don't believe he cares for me at all, not now—indeed how can he? I must find out, somehow. I must know what is true. Your sister said that you would help me."

"So he will, my dear," said Mrs. Trevor. "Come Lewis, which of these screens will give us the best hiding-place? To think that I should bring private theatricals into real life in this way. Look, can't you put us two chairs into this corner? Come, my dear. Now, Lewis, pay attention, and I will tell you what you are to say."

They took their places behind the screen, and she was beginning her explanation, when Margaret laid her hand upon hers, and whispered, "He is coming, I hear his step."

"Yes, so he is," said Austin, emerging quickly, drawing the screen close, and throwing a dark red curtain, negligently, over one of its corners.

He snatched up his brush from the easel-tray and his palette from a chair, and stood before his picture as before, but looking red, flurried and guilty.

William came in, unsuspicious, said a few insignificant sentences, put on a shabby and paint-stained coat, and got out his painting materials. He was looking pale, worn, and aged. A sudden ray of sunlight, falling on his down-bent head revealed a line or two of white among the black.

Mrs. Trevor, glancing sideways at Margaret, saw that tears had come into her eyes. Austin, embarrassed in his quality of conspirator by the presence of those two fellow conspirators behind the screen, hardly knew how to begin. He went over and stood by William for a minute or two in silence. Then he said, "How you do get on? That 'Electra' will be a fine thing."

"Perhaps," said William with his eyes on his work.

"No 'perhaps' at all—it will; ten times finer than that portrait."

William glanced quickly at Margaret's likeness. "That portrait—Ah, it brought me my first success."

"I wish you had never painted it," said Austin, and there was sincerity enough in the wish to bring a note of truth to his voice.

"What do you mean? I would not give it away for its weight in gold."

"Take my advice, and pack it off to Sir Frederick Brackenridge for a wedding-present."

"What do you mean, Austin? It is not true. It is impossible—I know it is not true."

"I had it from my sister," said Austin, "and she—"

"Oh I know—from Lady Walsh. That's nothing—nothing at all."

"She had seen Miss Morrison."

"No—when?"

"To-day, this morning. She wished that you should be told. Gertrude commissioned me to tell you."

There was a moment or two of complete stillness in the studio. Then William walked rather unsteadily across the room, picked up a piece of tapestry, flung it across the frame of Margaret's portrait, and drew it as a curtain over the picture.

He came back towards Austin, and said in an altered and harder voice "It is done with; don't let us say any more about it."

He took up his brush, looked vacantly at his picture and laid it away again; dropped himself upon a chair, and sat looking blankly before him.

Austin stood, holding his breath and waiting for some sign from behind the screen. But none came, and after a minute or so, he could bear it no longer. He went up to William, and touched his shoulder. "Come and paint," he said, gently.

William shook his head. "I can't. Don't talk to me. Let me be, there's a good fellow."

Austin went back to his picture and began putting little dabs of paint with an uncertain hand upon its background. "Why does she not come out?" he thought. "Does she not mean to come out, after all?"

Margaret, meanwhile, was sitting quite still and quite pale, longing to move, but overcome by a kind of terror.

Presently, William broke forth into the usual cry

of all human pain. "If it had only been anything else. I could have borne anything but this. But now, what is there left to do!—It is impossible. I can't believe it. I wont believe it till she tells me so herself. I'll go and see her—yes, I'll go and see her at once."

Then the screen was pushed aside, and Mrs. Trevor came out.

"Stop, Mr. Askerdale" said she,

She herself was a good deal affected by the general emotional atmosphere. As for William, he simply stared at her without uttering any greeting, too confused and preoccupied to be even very much surprised. She pushed back the screen, and showed Margaret standing, pale and agitated, behind it. William was at her side in a moment.

"Margaret!"

"You don't believe it, Will? you don't believe it, do you?"

Mrs. Trevor drew away her brother, towards the other part of the room.

"I do wonder," she said, shaking her head with a little air of comic dismay, "what Lady Walsh will say to me."

"Never mind Lady Walsh, Gertrude. The only question in my mind is, whether we have really done a good turn to Askerdale."

"Do you doubt that? you don't know Margaret, Lewis."

"No, dear, I don't. Until this morning I

always disliked her; but now, if she will marry Askerdale and make him happy—and not look black upon her husband's old friends—I will hold her above all the women in the world, except about two."

All this had, of course, been said in undertones. A murmur of voices had come, meanwhile, from the lovers in their distant corner. Now they came forth, William radiant, Margaret full of a shy joy.

"How are we to thank you both?" said he, turning from one to the other.

She without a word, put her hands into Mrs. Trevor's and kissed her. Those of her admirers who thought her cold should have seen her then.

"And now, perhaps, we may take the tapestry off the picture again," said Austin, smiling, indeed, but a little grimly.

Then, Margaret turning quickly towards him, with her hand still in his sister's, made a little graceful speech that won his allegiance for ever.

"Mr. Austin," said she. "When I am married, will you give me away? I have no father, you know, and no brother, and I want William's best friend to be mine too."

"Gertrude," said he, "you are quite right. We need not be afraid of our share in this conspiracy."

"What!" said William. "Afraid of doing a good deed! Why, I owe you two the happiness of my life."

"And I," said Margaret, "of mine."

And thus finished, to the ordinary apprehension, the love story of these two. But, since no human story is really ended but by death, there remains yet another chapter.

III.

THE story of William and Margaret ended, as far as Austin and Mrs. Trevor could judge, in the most orthodox manner, by a marriage and happiness ever after. Margaret, having finally chosen her part gave way to no repinings. She became William's wife and devoted herself, as she had declared that she would do, to fulfilling all the outward needs of his life. He advanced, steadily, from the time of his marriage, in position and celebrity. People discovered that his house was charming, and that Mrs. Askerdale was as beautiful, and far more genial, than Miss Morrison had been. Even Lady Walsh began to think that perhaps her niece had chosen not unwisely for herself. William's pictures were never hung in corners now, never unsold, never unnoticed by the dealers. They were, in the better sense of the word, popular. He had become an Associate of the Academy, and nobody doubted that

the honour was well-earned, or that the fuller dignity would, by-and-by, follow. Every year brought his two or three portraits and a picture or two, and every picture was graceful and of exquisite imitative perfection. But the 'Electra' of which Austin had prophecied success, had never been among them. He had somehow departed from the lines of his early ambition. The critics who praised him, the wealthy men who bought his pictures, the friend who had worked with him, the wife who was the light of his eyes, observed no falling off. Only he knew that he had failed to fulfil his life. To all the world he seemed a quiet, contented, deservedly rising man, a little silent and absent, and looking, perhaps, more worn and old than he should have done, but, beyond all question, happy and successful. As for Margaret, the dream of her life had come true; she longed for nothing further. Her husband and her children occupied her whole care and thoughts, and her husband stood first. She was not one of the women in whom motherhood becomes all, and wifehood next to nothing. William was still 'William' to her, and not 'Papa.' She delighted to sit to him, and took a frank pleasure in the knowledge that, after seven years of marriage, she was still his most beautiful model. She had set herself to become interested in art, and rejoiced to find that the public verdict accorded almost always with her own. The subjects and modes of treatment of her husband's pictures were

frequently of her suggesting. It might well be said of her by her friends that she was an ideal wife for an artist. Austin had long ago lost all doubt of her; to his mind, William's marriage had made the completion of his life. His friend's work filled him with a generous satisfaction. No perception of lowered aims darkened its perfection for him. It is natural enough that the half artist should incline to exalt unduly the triumphs of mere executive skill. It is in this field that he himself struggles; he knows so well the difficulties that have been surmounted and the cunning by which the effects have been produced. To him it seems no condemnation that 'the form, the form alone, is eloquent.' Perhaps Austin, if he could have beheld the completed 'Electra' side by side with William's work of to-day, would have said 'The first is better;' but he felt no failing in the second. Art was for him a relaxation, not a religion, and he would never have guessed that a change in the direction of his artistic activity could weigh as a moral declension on a man's soul. He thought, with Margaret, that overwork alone had brought the lines about her husband's mouth, the fast spreading grey into his hair, and the often recurring look of weariness to his eyes. Margaret, indeed, understood that William sometimes regretted those unprofitable ways of art from which she had weaned him; but she reckoned this as merely a slight example of the repining tendency inherent

in humanity. She had no doubt of the good effect of her influence, under which he had increased in wealth, renown and artistic power. For good or ill, there was now no turning back. Custom, that greatest tyrant of our lives had made Askerdale a popular painter; his hand and his mind alike were now out of the former groove; quick coming commissions kept his hours employed, a fashionable artist has no time to weep for his lost ideal. But the hidden remorse was always there, and a trifle would serve to awaken it.

One morning, Austin came, by appointment, to introduce a young girl-cousin of his, an art-student to whom he wished that William should give some lessons. William, as a rule, rather disliked to teach, but was inclined, this time, for Austin's sake, to yield. The young girl, Miss Legarde, was a little dark-eyed creature, with quick French speech and movement. Some drawings which she had brought showed a fine artistic instinct and no little trained skill. William was much pleased, and said a few strong words of praise that brought up the quick colour to her face, and made her dark eyes glow. The question of teaching, it was decided, must wait a few days, until William could be certain of his time. Then she was shown such pictures of his own as he happened to have in the studio. She admired, warmly, but with discrimination. Presently, in looking at one of the latest, she said "Oh yes, the *painting* is perfect, but—" she stopped

herself, colouring a little, and repeated, "Yes, the painting is perfect."

"But what, Miss Legarde?" asked William. "Pay me the greatest compliment of truth.—But —what, were you going to say?"

The young girl looked up, and answered frankly.

"I was going to say: can you be content to paint only things like this? I know I have no right to criticise; it is a great presumption, knowing as little as I do, but I can't help thinking that it seems a pity, with all that power, not to use it on some really noble theme, something where the thought should be as fine as the execution."

"You are quite right" said William, in a low tone. And he quoted a line from a book that was new then and in every one's remembrance: "'Our deeds are fetters that we forge ourselves.'"

"'Ay truly,'" she answered, following the quotation but still with her eyes upon the picture. "'But I think it is the world that brings the iron.'"

He looked at her, watching the keen, intent, young face and quick, dark eyes, and wishing that he might have had such a girl as this for a daughter or for a young sister.

"I hope," he said, in the same quiet, deeply earnest tones, "that the world may bring no such iron to you."

Then, rather abruptly, he turned away, and going to one corner of the room, dragged forth, with some difficulty, a large and dusty canvas, the still incomplete 'Electra.'

"Ah yes" she cried, turning upon it, with radiant eyes. "Oh, but you will finish this."

"Not now; the time is gone. It has stood in that corner for many years and you are the first person to whom I have shown it."

"Oh, is that the old 'Electra'?" said Austin. "Upon my word, you have never done anything finer than that promised to be."

"Promises are apt to be finer than fulfilments, you know," Askerdale answered, with rather a melancholy smile.

Miss Legarde was still standing before the picture, her lips a little apart, her eyes wide and eager. He felt as if the blessing of appreciation had never befallen work of his until now. He himself had turned quite white, and carried his hand, with the involuntary movement of sudden pain, to his heart.

By-and-by, when the two were gone, he put the picture back into its dark corner again, and went on, half mechanically, with his work. In the evening, he came back to the studio, and once more brought forth the 'Electra.' He stood for some time before it, looking at it in silence. The glance of this young girl had called back to him the dreams of his youth. Was it too late yet? he asked himself. If the mere meeting of a chance few minutes could so awaken the old fervour, what would it be to see her often, to have this young zeal and ardour constantly before him? And at least, she might be kept from falling away as he had done. The spirit

of brotherhood in art, so strong, as many a young artist thankfully knows, among its worthiest followers, made his own decline seem hardly wasted if it taught him to save others from the same. Then he looked up, with a sigh, at his wife's portrait, hanging still on his studio wall and watching him with the clear, serene eyes that were as frank, and as loving now as then. But their glance seemed to wither his reawakened hopes. To his eyes there dwelt upon the calmly smiling lips the quiet contempt of a Fate, sitting apart, and foreknowing human failure. The very presence of her picture in the room seemed to to chill his brightest hope.

"I have tried to serve two masters," he murmured to himself, "and have failed. Art ought to have been enough. Ah, Reynolds, you knew best, you, the wisest and greatest of us all."

He sighed, thinking for a moment with envy as well as reverence, of the serene master whose heart, doubtless, knew its own bitterness. Perhaps, in the days to come, some struggling artist might think with the same envy of Askerdale, for whom the ways of success had been so smooth. He turned back to the other picture of his youth. 'Electra,' no, he should never paint 'Electra' now ; he could never hope again to look, like God, upon a work of his, and know it very good. He would go on, and learn, and earn, and be made R. A., and die ; but the dreams of his youth were over ; he would never be a great painter now.

"And yet," he said, aloud, standing up in the half-dark studio. "I don't know, even now, which way was right or wrong. I only know that I have spoilt my life, somehow."

Again the thoughts sank into silence. "How blind we are! Years ago, I might have killed myself, if Margaret had broken faith with me. And now—What? Do I regret it? No, no, not that; my dear Margaret, with her whole life wrapped up in mine. I am ungrateful to her—a good wife to a repining husband. Oh no, it is no fault of hers; only my misfortune, the irony of fate that made us love each other. And yet her very portrait weakens me as I paint; I can't speak of my best thoughts to her; to her they mean nothing. If she could only have been like that girl, this morning—But why go over it all again? The past is past; nothing can bring it back again."

"William," said his wife's voice. "William, are you here?"

She came in, dressed in a light dress, with flowers in her hair, and a white cloak over her arm. "Oh make haste and get ready," said she, coming close to him. "We shall be late."

"Late, Margaret?"

"Oh, Will, have you forgotten? It is Lady Ipingford's musical party to-night."

"Yes, I had forgotten. I am very tired to-night, Margaret; I think you must let me off for this once."

"Oh, William."

"And this pain, that I told you of, is troubling me again."

"You work too hard," said she, looking down with tender solicitude as she stood beside his chair.

"Do I?" he answered, with a little motion of the lips that did not get so far as to become a smile.

"And you sit at home, and mope, too much. Come—it will do you good to come."

"My dear," said William looking up, and smiling, through all his melancholy, at the gracefulness of the picture that met his eyes; "Rest and quiet are what will do me good. Leave me alone, this once, and I will promise to come next time."

"And you will sit here all alone, and paint by gaslight and look so pale to-morrow, and so worn. Indeed, you do look very pale, to-night. Shall I stay with you?"

"Oh no; I am not ill, dear, only tired."

"I would not go if it were anywhere else; but Lady Ipingford is somebody; it does you good to have your wife seen there. But if I go, you won't paint, will you?"

"No, I won't paint."

"And you won't sit up for me?"

"No, I will be very obedient. Let me put on your cloak for you."

She took the long white cloak from her and put it on, gravely, a little as if she were a lay-figure.

"I like this cloak; it hangs so well."

"You put it on so well," said she; "there is some use in having an artist for an husband."

He had sat down again, overcome for a moment by a sharp return of pain. She stooped and kissed his forehead saying "Good night, I wish you could have come. How hot your head is; I am afraid it aches."

"Not much; not enough to trouble about, only enough to make rest pleasant."

"I know you work too hard," said she, her face still bent towards him with a look of anxious affection in her eyes.

The tone, the glance, filled him with remorseful tenderness. How could he, even for a moment, have told himself that his life might have been better without her. As she was turning away, he kept her hand in his, rose to his feet and saying "Good night my dear," kissed her, earnestly.

She did not understand—how should she?—half the emotions that went to make the kiss, but she was pleased that he should have given it, and went away, smiling, as beautiful as health, content and love could make her.

He, when she was gone, sat down again, telling himself that whatever might have been possible once, the one thing impossible, now, was division between himself and her. No, their union was his first care. He would not, even, he said to himself, undertake the teaching of Miss Legarde, who had made him feel the blank. If Margaret could not

look into those secret, deepest recesses, they should be opened to no other woman's eyes. Miss Legarde must fight her battle alone like the rest. Yet it was a pity, almost a cowardice, to withhold the help which he and perhaps he alone, might have given, the help so much needed and so seldom found in this solitary world. He went to a table standing in a corner, and took pen and ink, resolved to write to Austin before his mind should change. He wrote hastily that after considering the matter, he found it would not be possible for him to make Miss Legarde his pupil; he regetted on his own part that he would not see the stages of her advance, since he was sure that, if she were but true to herself, she ought to reach a high position. There he paused, asking himself whether he might venture to say more. Then he wrote on:

"If I might dare to give her one warning, I would say 'be slow to marry.' It is hard enough, at the best, for a woman to make her way in art; with a husband anything less than wholly sympathetic, it must be nearly impossible. The love of art must be the centre of an artist's life, not love of man or woman. If indeed, the other love comes as the crown of that, in perfect sympathy—it does, you know, sometimes," (he wrote those words meaning and hoping that they should be applied to himself) "then comes the perfection of art and life. But life is seldom perfect, and I should grieve, for art's sake as well as Miss Legarde's own, over the failure of hers."

Then again he paused, but added only the needful phrases of conclusion, and closed the letter. That was done. He came back to the picture standing, pale and shadowy, on the easel. He had no desire to touch it. It could never be completed now; the lines of beauty, fixed as they were, would never be nearer perfection; it must remain for ever pale, unfinished, a shadow—and the image of his life.

The man was dead, who had drawn those lines in hope, believing in himself. He had died young, and his work was sacred; his was a happy life, that young man's, with his passions and his dreams. But he who was William Askerdale to-day, could no more go back to those thoughts and hopes than to the ambitions and despairs of the school-boy. 'Our deeds are fetters that we forge ourselves;' the words came back to his lips, and called forth a cry of rebellion. "Ah, but to wear them to the end! Is there no freedom? not even of confession to any human soul."

Electra, from the easel, looked down on him with her white tragic face, bearing the load of destiny. Suddenly, she grew pale and confused before him; the quick spasm of pain snatched at his heart again, and he sank back in his chair.

Late at night, when Margaret came home, she saw a light still burning in the studio.

"Mr. Askerdale has forgotten to turn out the gas again," she said to the servant who had sat up.

She went in, followed by the servant with a light. On the table near the door, lay a letter addressed to Mr. Austin. A white and ghostly picture was on the easel. Margaret's quick eye saw something else.

"He has fallen asleep," she said, in a quick unsteady voice.

She went hastily to him. He had fallen asleep indeed. The freedom for which he cried had come to him. He sat dead before his unfinished 'Electra.'

TOPSY.

TOPSY.

TOPSY EDGBURTON—her godfathers and godmothers called her Charlotte, but she had never been called so since—sat at work behind her bed-room window. The window commanded, in front, a view of Dwininghurst High Street, and, on the left, a shorter peep into the crookedness of Church Lane. The slow, persistent glare of a midsummer afternoon was fading into the paler lights and longer shadows of evening; dim beginnings of twilight softened the outlines of hill and field, and dreamy-eyed cows moved slowly homeward between the leafy hedgerows. The line of shadow widened in the dusty High Street; groups of idlers gathered at shop doors and in inn-porches: Jack Rusper, the grocer's son, came out from the atmosphere of cheese and sugar, and stood, with his hands behind him, whistling, and looking up the street.

Topsy bent a little more forward when this occurred, and gave her needle a moment's holiday.

But Jack happening to turn his eyes in that direction, she at once became absorbed in her work, and was blind to the High Street and all its doings. Yet, when Jack took his eyes away, and sauntered back into his father's shop, she was sufficiently well aware of it to look again, and sigh.

This upper window, looking out, like a deep set eye, from beneath broad eaves of thatch, belonged to an old, low-roofed house with a little shop in its lower storey. The shop was dark, and dingy; its ceiling was low and its floor was beneath the level of the street, so that the unwary customer announced himself by a stumble on the threshold. An inscription, dim with age, ran along the doorway, which, being deciphered, read thus :—

J. Waterworth, Stationer and Fancy Dealer, A.D. 1821.

J. Waterworth's name had almost faded from above his door, and stood instead, upon his tombstone, followed by a later date, and with the name of another J. Waterworth beneath it. The widow of the second Waterworth kept the shop now, and her rosy-cheeked boys and girls were growing up into men and women. Topsy grew among them. She was the daughter of a National School Master, who, in life, had been John Waterworth's dearest friend, and now, in death, rested beside him, in Dwininghurst churchyard. Perhaps Topsy's thoughts were of these things, as she looked across the sunlighted opening of Church Lane, with the long, thin shadow of the church spire lying

black upon its white dust; of the dead past, lying buried under its nameless mound of turf, and the unborn future, lying—who knows where? Surely, she thinks, not very far away; her mind looks towards the future much as her eyes look into the street, seeing the outsides of the houses and knowing the faces within.

The door of the bedroom was opened; a tall, quick-eyed girl came in.

"Come, Topsy; Seth's just going to shut up, and we shall have time to go across to Mrs. Scott's with that skirt of hers. Look sharp, there's a dear."

Topsy laid her work, in one armful, on the bed, and brushing away her little ends of thread and little ends of thought together, answered:

"I'm ready; I should like a walk."

Topsy's readiness was apparently rather of the mind than of the body, for it was not until nearly ten minutes later that she came into the little parlour behind the shop. It must be owned that the ten minutes had not been unemployed. Her plain, brown dress had given place to an immaculate muslin with the folds of freshness not yet out of it; and the curly black hair, to which she owed her nickname, had been twisted into a smoother and rounder knot under a very becoming hat.

Mrs. Waterworth looked and smiled in silence, with a quiet, motherly smile, as she gave them the

basket which they were to carry. Passing through the shop they found Seth closing the shutters, and Seth was not so discreet as his mother. He paused from his occupation, and asked;

"Whose wedding are you going to, Topsy?"

"Nonsense," said Topsy, with much dignity. "One must look respectable when one goes out."

"And one never knows who one may meet, does one?" said Seth's sister, with a meaning look over her right shoulder, as they turned down Church Lane.

"*Don't*, Susy," said Topsy, in the tone of a person to whom such light-minded remarks were distasteful.

"Well?" persisted Susy. "Where's the harm? I'm always glad to meet my neighbours—if I like them, that is—and especially when they have just come back from across the common."

"Across the common," is a Dwininghurst phrase, denoting all localities on the other side of the large common which runs over the hills from Dwininghurst to Edgely.

Susy sighed as she said, "across the common," and was a moment silent, then she went on in a more earnest tone:

"I hope we may meet him, I'm sure."

Topsy looked up surprised, and, as it seemed, a little displeased. She did not ask, "whom?" but said, presently; "You usen't to care so much about Jack at one time."

"I don't care about him now," said Susy. "Only it's pleasant to have someone to speak to."

Topsy was silent, revolving Susy's sayings in her mind. They did their errand at the farm, talked a little gossip, and tasted Mrs. Scott's seed-cake; then, turning homeward through the darkening lanes, they did indeed see a figure coming towards them at a good, round pace.

"Here he is, I declare!" said Susy; she looked pleased.

Topsy said nothing, and did not look altogether pleased, but kept her eyes on the ground and blushed.

"Oh, good evening;" said Jack, with more surprise than seemed quite genuine. "Have you been for a walk?"

"We have been to Mrs. Scott's," replied Susy.

"How lucky that I came this way," said Jack, turning and walking with them.

"I expect you find Dwininghurst dull after Alesborough;" observed Susy, as the three followed their long shadows on the sandy road.

"Not I," answered Jack. "Alesborough's well enough for a bit, but you soon get tired of the noise, and the carts, and the smoke, and the people always coming and going. Leastways I did, and there's others besides me would rather be in Dwininghurst than Alesborough, if they'd the choice."

"Really now?" said Susy. "Now I fancy

sometimes I should like to go to Alesborough—just to see the place, you know."

Jack shook his head, as if to say that he had seen enough of Alesborough.

"No; here I am, and here I stay. It's well enough to learn their ways of doing things yonder, and I daresay I have learned a thing or two in the way of trade—but the old place suits me best. I like to know my neighbours, I do."

"Didn't you know your neighbours in Alesborough then?"

"Oh—I knew 'em to speak to, you know."

"I thought there were two young ladies kept a milliner's shop next door," said Topsy, who up this time had said nothing.

"Oh, yes; there were them," Jack admitted. "And there was young Burton, and all his people, and Miss Ashlidge, who kept the books, and her niece, who was apprenticed to aunt's sister—there were all them."

"And there were your aunt's nieces, too," said Topsy.

"Yes, there were," said Jack.

"And Lizzie Styers," said Susy, in a lower tone.

"Oh, yes; and William. I used to see a good-ish deal of William. Sundays and that, we used to be together."

"I suppose they are much as usual?" said Susy, in the same tone.

"Oh, yes; I don't think William has altered a

bit—not in any way," he added, dropping his voice and stooping a little towards Susy, so that the exact words escaped Topsy who was on his other hand.

"It wouldn't matter to me, if he had;" said Susy. "I'm sure it might be for the better."

"Well, I don't say but what it might," Jack admitted, regretfully.

"H'm! There's many a worse than Will Styers;" said Susy, turning an angry face upon him.

Topsy wondered how it was that these two always talked of William Styers. They must surely know by this time that it only led to something very much like quarrelling whenever they met. She determined to warn Jack privately at the next opportunity. It might be that he did not know how serious the quarrel had been between William and Susy before William went away to Alesborough. Topsy, however, remembered how Susy had declared that she would never hear his name again, and how she had said "A good thing too" when she heard that he had left Dwininghurst.

"How quiet you are, Topsy," said Jack, suddenly, in her ear.

"You and Susy find so much to talk about that I'm glad to listen."

"Let me carry your basket for you," said Jack, in a conciliatory manner.

"It's empty, thank you," answered Topsy, without looking up. Jack walked on between the two

girls in silence, and wondered what he had done to offend them both. Susy was the first to speak again.

"You're not thinking of going back to Alesborough, then?"

"No," said Jack. "What makes you ask?"

"Oh—I don't know—I thought perhaps you might."

"No, Susy; I shall stay at home. Father, he's glad to have me, and I'm glad to bide."

"I wish I was a young man;" said Susy, with sigh. "I'd go farther than Alesborough—to London very likely, I would."

"I hope you're not thinking of doing so?" said Jack more gravely.

"Why?"

"Some people I know of would be sorry, that's all."

"Well—I don't suppose I'm going," said Susy. "So it doesn't much signify to talk about it." Then, with a sudden wrench of the conversation, she asked, almost impatiently, "What ever does make you so quiet to-night, Topsy? You have hardly opened your mouth, since back we turned."

"I'm tired;" answered Topsy, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Tired—are you?" said Jack, turning towards her at once. "I wish you'd let me carry your basket."

"What nonsense," said Topsy. "Why, I told

you before, it's empty."

But Jack took it, though it was empty, and said, "You work too hard, Topsy, that's what you do. I see you up at that window, hour after hour, with your needle going like a steam-engine. Look here, take my arm—won't you?"

Topsy declined that offer, and said she didn't think she worked particularly hard—it was the hot weather made her tired.

They were turning now into the lower end of Church Lane, and the high hedges were sweet with honeysuckle. Jack reached up, and gathered a very fine, full blossom.

"You like honeysuckle, don't you, Topsy?"

"Oh, thank you;" said Topsy, smiling into a succession of dimples, and putting the honeysuckle into the front of her dress.

They came to the little shop at the corner.

"Won't you come in?" asked Susy.

"No, not to-night, I think, thank you," answered Jack, shaking hands, first with Susy and then with Topsy.

The girls went in to supper. The whole family were sitting round the table in the little parlour, Mrs. Waterworth and "grandfather," Andrew, Seth and Rosie, and Tommy. Mrs. Waterworth looked up with that kindly, sympathetic smile of hers; Seth, pausing, with a piece of meat upon his fork, asked, "Did you see Jack Rusper?"

"Yes," answered Susy, drawing her hat backward across her hair.

"He asked which way you'd gone," said Seth; Susy smiled.

"What did he say?" asked Andrew.

"Oh—nothing particular; he thinks he shall stay at home now, he doesn't like Alesborough."

"He's quite right, quite right," said grandfather. "Young folks is best at home—the fish had best keep to the pond, all time."

"There's different sorts of fishes, though, grandfather," said Andrew. "The salmon don't stop where they're born, do they? They go right away to the sea."

"Ah—but they come back again, Andy; they come back again, and so do the swallows, and the finches, and all of 'em. They all come back, and young folks had best come back too."

"Then perhaps Bill Styers—" began Tommy, but a lifted finger and a warning look from Andrew silenced him.

"I never saw such a fellow as Jack's got to be," said Seth. "One time he was as keen after moles, and rats, and what not as another, but now I don't know what's come to him—he'd rather go off after Susy and Topsy than all the rats in the place. Alesborough has just spoilt him, that's what I think."

"It isn't Alesborough has spoilt him," said Susy. "You are just like all boys; you don't understand that folks get too old for your boy's games."

"My conscience!" said Tommy.

Seth, not at all abashed, retorted, "Well, it's right enough you should stand up for him, for he did nothing but talk about you."

Susy coloured, and cast a look at Topsy.

"Yes, he did," Seth went on. "Wanted to know if you'd got a young man, and—"

"Hold your tongue, Seth," said Susy, sharply. "You are talking a lot of rubbish, and Topsy dosen't like it."

"Oh, *I* don't care," said Topsy. "It's nothing to do with *me*."

Yet in spite of that protestation, Topsy shed a few very angry tears when she was alone in the little bedroom whose window looked upon the High Street. It was too bad, *too bad*. She couldn't bear it. Jack ought not to behave like that. She didn't want to keep company with him—why should she? There were plenty more young men in Dwininghurst—but people shouldn't make up to one girl one day, and to another girl another day. It made one look so foolish, and people talked so. Then she took the sprig of honeysuckle out of her dress, and looked at it. What did he give *her* honeysuckle for? Did he want to make amends to her because he had gone over to Susy? She threw the honeysuckle on the floor. The very scent of it, clinging about her dress, was hateful to her. Then she put away her hat, and took off her dress; of what use were muslin dresses to her, if Jack preferred Susy in last summer's alpaca? She un-

fastened her hair, and shaking out the soft, thick blackness, stooped to look at herself in a foggy, little looking glass. Surely there must have been some mistake somewhere. She used to think herself pretty—she used to think Jack thought so too. She bent down, looking into her own disconsolate eyes, and holding the glass with one hand from swinging backward. The position was uncomfortable; she knelt down and let it swing. She felt something beneath her knee—it was the piece of honeysuckle. She picked it up and held it to her face. She looked no more at her own reflection, but laid the sprig of blossom away in a drawer and hid it beneath a pocket-handkerchief. Her anger had died out, and it was with a pathetic little face of wretchedness that she closed the drawer and turned away.

Sunday morning came, a summer Sunday, calm, hot, cloudless, that seemed to give a deeper meaning to the old dedication which named it the Sun-god's day. The Dwininghurst congregation was always slow to disperse after service; men and women gathered in little knots discussing the affairs of life beside the graves of their dead who used to stand there with them. Many an old man who came from a mile or two away, would go, Sunday after Sunday, to that spot in the churchyard where his wife, and often a child or two besides, lay buried, and would think of the time when his name too would stand upon the stone.

It was a custom among these country people, to whom death came as a natural part of life. The dead scarcely seemed far away when they read their names and saw the grass upon their graves every Sunday. It was scarcely different from seeing the familiar faces, and hearing the well-known voices of the living. Mrs. Waterworth never failed to pause a moment by that stone which records the death of John Waterworth, and, at an earlier date, of "Eliza, daughter of John and Susan Waterworth, aged 6 years and 2 months." Grandfather stands there too; his wife rests here, and two sons; the third lies far away, buried namelessly on a Crimean battle-field. Perhaps, when the old man spoke of the salmon and the swallows, who all come home, he may have been thinking of one, of whom there came home only a letter from an army chaplain, and a lock of stained hair.

There was no stone to mark the resting-place of Topsy's father, and having neither visible record nor certain memory, by which to keep him near her, her dead father was to her a mystery, like the individualities of a dream. He was not a Dwining-hurst man; he came from far away, drawn by affection for the Dwininghurst maiden who became his wife. It seemed to Topsy as if the life that had been drawn to the little South country village had fulfilled itself, and stirred in her to go forth again to the unknown world from which it came.

Mr. Rusper came up, and spoke a few words to Mrs. Waterworth. He had a great respect, he used to say, in his deliberate way, for Mrs. Waterworth, and there were not many people for whom Mr. Rusper would say so much. Jack was standing with the young Waterworths; Topsy, a little aside, at the foot of her father's grave.

"We are going to Edgely to church, this evening;" said Susy.

"I haven't been over to Edgely—not since I've been home;" observed Jack.

"Well, you can come to-night, if you like."

"Very well—I will then, and if the rector scolds us—let him."

"I don't think I shall go," said Topsy, when Susy told her it was time to get ready, if she was going to Edgely.

"Oh, yes, come along, Topsy," said Andrew.

Andrew was the eldest of all the Waterworths, older than that little Eliza in the churchyard, who died the year that Topsy was born. He had petted and protected Topsy when she was little more than a baby, and he petted and protected her still. His sisters complained that she was his favourite, and Dwininghurst gossip at one time took upon itself to prophesy that she would some day become his wife. But Topsy and Andrew knew better, for had not Andrew told her the story which no one else—unless, indeed, the quiet mother, who knew everything that touched her children, even guessed

at? Topsy kept the story in very tender memory, thinking of it often in these later days, and wondering sometimes whether the very truest love must, of its nature, be unreturned.

"Come along, Topsy," said Andrew, now.

"Yes, come, Topsy," said Susy. "Jack Rusper's going."

"Then you and Jack won't want *me*;" answered Topsy.

"Well, I want you, anyway," said Andrew, and Topsy rose, doubtfully.

"Why, you little goose, I declare you are jealous!" said Susy, with a tone of tenderness in her voice, as she put her arm round her, and drew her out of the room.

"I'm not jealous, and I'm not a goose," said Topsy, freeing herself from the arm, and going upstairs alone.

It must be owned that Topsy did not contribute to make the walk to Edgely pleasant. She answered Jack's "good evening," very coldly, gave him short replies, and presently dropped behind and joined herself to Andrew, who, finding her disinclined to talk, respected her mood, and walked beside her in silence.

They turned across the wide, high-lying common, the purple surface-tint of the heather mellowing the under green of the turf. Clumps of firs grew on the highest summits, stray cattle roamed and fed, and the light, fresh hill-breezes

stirred and rippled in the clear warm air.

Presently they swerved downwards upon a village lying in a hollow of the hills, gradual stretches of woodland rose before them, and at their feet lay Edgely water, and the mill.

"I love this place," said Andrew, softly, and Topsy knew why. She put her hand into his, and sighed. It was a place to love at first sight, as it lay, calm and beautiful in the evening sunshine, with the swell and fall of church bells coming and going upon the breeze. They walked the length of the narrow village street to the old church at its end, and found Jack and Susy waiting for them at the door.

There is something inexpressibly soothing in the evening service at a country church, the open doors, with the soft, sweet-scented air breathing through them, the appearance of age and long-lasting, and repose that rests upon the church; the slowly-growing shadows, and the swelling of the last hymn in the gathering twilight. Then, as the congregation pours itself away, the broad red sunset, and the gradually paling tints of gold that die away at last into the wide, soft greyness of the east.

Topsy had gone to the far end of the pew, and consequently now came out last. She found that Jack had lingered in the porch, but she followed Andrew without pausing. Jack was annoyed, he hastened to join Susy, and Topsy soon heard them talking and laughing together.

"Andrew," said Topsy. "I should like to go away."

"To go away!" said Andrew.

"Yes; I should like to be a shop-girl or something, and see some other place—somewhere bigger than Dwininghurst—and learn to do something for myself."

Andrew appeared to consider the proposition; then he said; "Don't be in a hurry, Topsy. Things seem to come and go, and then come back again after all, if you wait a little."

Topsy looked at the pair in front, and Andrew saw the direction of her eyes.

"Tell me your troubles, Topsy; it's heavy work bearing one's pain quite alone, and you know I should care."

"I have nothing to tell," she answered. "And —and that's it."

By the time they came to the far end of the High Street, Jack had relented.

"I don't think you're quite yourself this day or two, Topsy," he said, holding her hand still in his, as they paused in the empty street to say "good-night."

"I'm like other people, Jack; I want a change," she answered, with more of sorrow than of sharpness in her tone. Jack thought of that answer for many a long day after.

Topsy's mood was very sad that night, but scarcely angry. She began to believe, and to

accept as a fact, that Jack was beginning—indeed had begun—to prefer Susy to herself. As for her, she had probably been mistaken from the beginning. He had only looked upon her with the same friendly liking which he gave to Seth or to Rosie; it was a part of his kindly nature to be pleasant and helpful, and do little services for everyone; and she had been silly enough to imagine a deeper meaning in these things. It was not Jack's fault—no, nor even Susy's, though Topsy found that harder to acknowledge. It was nobody's fault, it was only her misfortune. But she *must* go away—at least while their courtship lasted.

Yet when Topsy opened her eyes next morning upon a fair, still, dawn, and, pushing wide her lattice window, saw the pale shadows lying in the silent streets, and felt the cool air stirring in her hair, she could not but believe that the world was really fresh and young, and that Jack cared for her after all. A sweet, fresh confidence came back to her and she went about, all day, with the fluttered interchange of smile and blush of a girl who feels her first love-letter at her heart.

That evening she had some work to carry home to the lower end of the High Street, and coming back, turned in at the garden gate, (the garden was behind the house, and had its side to the street) and sauntered slowly among the old-fashioned alleys and over-grown flower-beds. Suddenly, from the other side of a thick barrier of elder bushes,

came the sound of voices. Topsy paused a moment. There was a wooden seat on the other side of the bushes, the speakers were sitting there. She heard Jack say, "I do think it's rather too bad, Susy; here I've been trying ever since I came home to do everything I can for you, and now you turn round on me in this way."

Susy made an answer, but it was too low to reach Topsy, and seemed to be half-smothered in tears.

"I can't make you women out, and that's the truth," said Jack. "You say you love a man, and yet you'll die rather than forgive him, when you've quarrelled with him. I declare, sometimes, I believe your love is all a sham together."

"I wish it was," said Susy between her tears.

"Now, Susy, don't cry—there's a dear girl—I don't think that—I should just have let you go your own way if I did—but do be sensible, and give me a plain answer. Have you thought about what I told you?"

"Yès," said Susy.

"And what am I to say to William?" asked Jack then, but Topsy did not hear that. At Susy's "yes" she crept away, and carried her sorrow to her room, unsuspected. The sweet hope that rose with the sun died with the sun, and she felt as if her youth died too.

Andrew noticed her pale face at supper, and said nothing. The next day, she moved about, looking

almost haggard, and said she had a headache. Susy was blithe and happy-eyed, as she had not been for months. Topsy felt that to stay on here in the old way would kill her. She wondered whether it was possible to live on with a perpetual sorrow weighing at the heart—Andrew had done it. But then Andrew was a man, and he had his plants and his greenhouses to comfort him. All day she moved and worked mechanically, her thoughts—when they waked at all, from a dull lethargy of pain—forming themselves into the one question, "How shall I get away?"

At tea-time something was said about Jack.

"Oh, he's coming in this evening," said Susy, quickly. Then, turning to Topsy—"He wondered he didn't see you yesterday."

"I was tired," said Topsy.

"It seems to me you're always tired now," said Seth.

Mrs. Waterworth looked at her kindly.

"I shall go and lie down," said Topsy; "and I hope no one will come and bother me. My head aches."

She went upstairs, drew down the blind, and lay down, with her face turned away from the window; the bright sunlight seemed to hurt her. After a while she began to wonder whether Jack was downstairs; she could hear voices, and now and then a laugh. Would he miss her? Would he ask for her? Would anybody come up to her? Then

again her mind would change, and she would be quite resolved that nothing should persuade her to go down—they were all happy without her, and they would see how unhappy she was, and how silly.

Presently the door did indeed open softly.

"Topsy!" said Susy's voice.

No answer.

"Topsy! Are you asleep?"

She came in, and stood by the bed.

"Well?" said Topsy, her face still turned away.

"Won't you come down, Topsy? Jack's there."

Topsy shook her head.

"Topsy dear, what's the matter? Do tell me."

"I've got a headache."

Susy put her arm round her, and with her face half-hidden in the black curls, whispered; "I've something to tell you."

"I don't want to hear it," said Topsy, trembling.

"I'm afraid you're unhappy because of me and Jack—I think you've made a mistake about it, Topsy—"

Topsy sat up suddenly, and shaking off Susy's encircling arm, turned round upon her, fiercely. "Go away—Why should you think I care what he does? You all seem to think.—Go away. I'm not unhappy at all—I'm not well; I asked you to let me alone."

She buried her face in the pillows again, and Susy went away, wondering.

"Topsy," said Mrs. Waterworth, next morning, "Mrs. Rawlins came in after tea yesterday evening; she's got a lady staying with her who wants a dress altered, and I told her I'd send up about it this morning. Will you go up about half past ten or so, my dear?"

Mrs. Rawlins was a person of some importance in Dwininghurst; her husband was a clergyman and a magistrate; and one of her daughters had married Sir Charles Maybridge, of Edgely Place. It was but proper therefore that Topsy should make rather more preparation for going to High Lea House than if she had been going to Mrs. Scott at Lye Farm. She put on that muslin dress whose first freshness had been devoted to the hope of meeting Jack, and—since this was a solemn occasion—her Sunday bonnet, made on the model of one bought in London by a niece of Mrs. Waterworth. She looked at herself, half indifferently, never suspecting, since she was not going to meet Jack, that her looks could have any influence on her future life.

Mrs. Carver was a rich, childless widow, who was profiting by an interregnum in the succession of her "companions" to pay a short visit to High Lea House. She looked at Topsy with a very pleasant smile; and in an accent which sounded strange in Topsy's South-country ears, begged her to "come upstairs and look at the dress."

The dress was tried on; Topsy pinned, and snip-

ped, and made a little fold here, and gave a little more room there.

"You are one of Mrs. Waterworth's daughters, I suppose?" said Mrs. Carver.

"No, ma'am; no relation. Father was a neighbour of Mrs. Waterworth's, that's all."

Mrs. Carver watched the quick fingers and delicate motions and determined to ask Mrs. Rawlins about this girl.

"Ah—you will make it do, I can see," she said presently. "My dressmaker in London isn't half so careful."

Topsy coloured, and smiled a little, and ventured to ask; "Do you think I could get work in London, ma'am?"

"It would be a great pity, if you did," said Mrs. Carver.

Topsy wondered why.

"London dressmakers are very hard-worked, and very ill paid; and they work in close, unhealthy rooms—you don't look strong enough for it. Do you want to go to London?"

"Yes, ma'am—at least I want to go away from Dwininghurst."

"Can you do anything else besides dressmaking?" Mrs. Carver asked, after a moment's pause,

"Yes, ma'am—I've been in the shop a good deal and helped with keeping the books, and that—and I could teach little children—I taught Rosie and Tommy everything they know almost, and Seth too,

in the evenings. Father was a schoolmaster, and I've got all his books."

"If I hear of anything I'll think of you;" said Mrs Carver, as Topsy folded up her parcel.

On the Saturday afternoon of this same eventful week, Topsy was called down to the little parlour, and was much surprised to see Mrs. Carver there. Still more was she surprised when Mrs. Carver, without any prelude, asked her whether she would like to be her companion.

Topsy would like it of all things, but doubted her own capabilities.

Mrs. Carver overruled her doubts, and made her promise to accompany her to London that day week, and to try how they suited one another, before finally deciding. Then she went away, having stayed about ten minutes in all, and left Topsy face to face with a new destiny.

There was much surprise and questioning when the news was announced at dinner-time. Grandfather shook his head, and said, "you won't see me again, Topsy,"—which made the tears stand in Topsy's eyes.

Andrew said nothing, but looked at her with that gentle, comprehending look that was so like his mother's. Susy wondered what Jack would say.

"Jack has nothing to do with me," said Topsy, sharply.

Jack was not at church the next morning; his father told them that he had gone over to Ales-

borough, to see his uncle and aunt. Topsy, looking at Susy, saw her blush suddenly crimson and become quite confused.

On Monday evening, when Mrs. Waterworth and Topsy were sitting in the parlour, a quick step sounded across the shop, and Jack came in.

"Where is Susy?" he asked at once. "I want to speak to her."

Topsy noticed how bright he looked, and how eager his tone was.

"She's in the garden," said Mrs. Waterworth, "I'll call her."

"No, don't do that—I'll go out; I can't stay a minute, but I just came across—"

The end of the sentence was lost in the passage as he hastened away. Ten minutes after, he came back, and declaring that he was in a great hurry, wished them "good-night," and ran home.

"I don't think he knows you are going away," said Mrs. Waterworth.

The news of Topsy's intention did not reach Jack until Wednesday, and he watched eagerly for an opportunity of getting speech with her alone. The opportunity did not arise until Thursday evening, when she walked over to bid good-bye to her old friend, Mrs. Scott. As she came back across the meadow in front of the farm, she became aware that Jack was lingering by the farther gate. She was half inclined to turn back—she felt an indefinite fear of the coming interview, and yet

a sense of gladness was upon her because he had come.

"Good evening," she said, calmly, when they met at the gate.

"Is it true that you are going away, Topsy," demanded Jack. He looked troubled, and anxious, and unlike himself.

"Yes, I'm going on Saturday—I'm rather in a hurry, so I'll wish you good-night." She held out her hand.

"I'm going with you," said Jack, briefly and decidedly.

They walked another field's length in silence, and reached an over-arched, sandy lane. Topsy longed for the open field again, and began to speak hastily.

"Yes, I'm going to London—and Mrs. Carver travels about a good deal, and so perhaps I shall go to Paris too."

"You seem fine and pleased," said Jack. Her light tone jarred upon him.

"I am," said Topsy. "Fine and pleased."

"You'll be a grand lady, and forget all your old friends."

"Perhaps I may. It'll be a change any way."

"Well, I suppose you know your own affairs best, Topsy, but I never thought you would go off in this way."

"One lives to see a good many things that one never thought of, and I don't see what call you had to think about me at all."

Jack was silent, and for a moment, deeply offended. When he did speak it was in a lower and more earnest tone.

"Perhaps I had no call—I've made a mistake, that's all, and I'm not the first, I daresay. I beg your pardon for thinking about you, if you don't like it, and I'll do my best that it shan't happen again."

Topsy laughed out loud, a shrill little laugh, like a cry. It was rather too much for Jack to talk in this way, as if she had been the first to change. Jack looked at her with displeased surprise, and muttered something between his teeth. An angry silence followed. They reached the lower end of Church Lane. Then Jack stopped suddenly, and said, "I can't bear this—We'd best go home apart—Good night. I'll see you again to say 'good-bye' before you go."

"Stop a minute," said Topsy.

They walked on slowly, and with a great effort, she said, "I'd rather say 'good-bye' to you now—I shall be very busy, and—and—I'd rather. And I'm sorry I spoke to you like that just now, when we're just going to part. We used to be friends, you know—when we were little children. I'm not well, and rather over busy, and that makes me cross. Good-bye. I hope you may be very happy, Jack, very happy."

Jack was much moved.

"But, Topsy, *must* you go?"

"Yes, I must, I must," said Topsy.

"Then let me see you again at least before you go."

"No," said Topsy. "It's better not; don't say any more, you'll make me quarrel with you, if you do. Good-bye, Jack. We part friends, don't we?"

"Friends! Ah well—I suppose so. Good-bye, Topsy."

They stood a moment with their hands linked together, and the same sorrow of parting in the eyes of both. Then the hands drew apart, and Jack went away up the hill. Topsy followed slowly. The same thought rang in each of the two hearts. "Is this the end? Is this the end?"

"I shall never see him again," said Topsy to herself, as she lay down to sleep that night.

"I shall never see him again," she thought to herself, as she sat in a first-class carriage, opposite to Mrs. Carver, and felt the first vibrations of the train.

"Well, how do you feel?" Mrs. Carver asked, when she said "good-night" to her in London, on Saturday evening.

"I feel like Cinderella," answered Topsy, drawing a long breath. But it is not recorded that Cinderella wished herself back among the ashes, nor that she shed tears over a piece of faded honeysuckle.

With Topsy's life in London this story has

nothing to do. It was full of wonders and of strange events, each more surprising than the last. She went about with her brown eyes round and wide in continual astonishment. She looked a little pale, but in answer to Mrs. Carver's questions, always declared that she was very happy, and so in a fashion, she was. She took a thorough delight in every new sight, but whenever she was alone, or in silence, a strong longing came upon her for fields, and fresh air, and familiar faces. If it had not been for the remembrance of Jack and Susy, she would have declared at once that she must go back to Dwininghurst. As it was, she contented herself with thinking how happy they must be without her.

She had been in London now a week; she had written a long description to Mrs. Waterworth of the wonders of her new life, but as yet no return letter had made its appearance. The postman, who to her country notions, seemed to be always coming, had never come for her. But now at last, on a foggy Monday afternoon, there arrived a letter for Miss Edgburton. She recognized Rosie's stiff, childish writing, with faint traces of rubbed-out pencil lines beneath the address.

"My dear Topsy:—We are all quite well, and hope you are the same. Mother desires her love, and so does Susy and Andrew; Seth is gone out. William Styers is here. He has come back from Alesborough. He is going to be a shopman at Mr.

Rusper's now. It is all made up between him and Susy, and I expect they will be married about Christmas. William is not quite like what he used to be, and he has a big beard. Jack Rusper went to Alesborough one Sunday on purpose to make him come back, and so he came back last Thursday. Susy seems very glad, and mother is very pleased, and so am I. William has given me a work box. Jack Rusper has not been here for a long time, not since you went away, but he went to Ipingford races last week, and Seth says he lost a lot of money. This morning, after church, he asked Andrew about Uncle James. He says he thinks very likely he shall go for a soldier. Seth says it is because you have gone away. I have got a kitten. It has a black nose and white ears. Tommy thinks it is ugly. I think I shall call it Topsy.

I have no more to say.

I remain, your affectionate friend.

Rose Amelia Waterworth."

Mrs. Carver was surprised by a sudden exclamation from the corner where Topsy was reading her letter, and looking up, was still more surprised to see her in tears.

"My dear! Have you had bad news?" she asked.

Topsy could only answer by a sob.

"May I read the letter?" asked Mrs. Carver, seriously alarmed.

Topsy gave it to her. She read in silence, then with a gradual smile spreading from her lips to her eyes, she asked, "And who is Jack Rusper?"

This was a question demanding more detail of answer than Topsy was at that moment capable of giving; but when Mrs. Carver had bidden her not to cry, and given her a minute or two to recover herself, she did manage to give some more or less intelligible account of her hopes and doubts and sorrows.

Mrs. Carver, having heard her story, told her, with a sigh, that she supposed she must let her go, and bade her write at once to Mrs. Waterworth. So Topsy wrote and explained that she was too home-sick to stay away and should come home the next day.

And Mrs. Waterworth, reading her letter, said quietly to Susy, "you may as well let Jack hear the news." It was raining when Topsy arrived at Dwininghurst the next evening, and everything was wrapped in a cobweb-covering of fog, from which the gas-lights of the station looked out like eyes from behind a veil. She stepped out upon the platform, and seemed to step into a flood of friendly voices—here were Susy and Andrew, and Rosie and Seth—and here, best of all, was Jack. They moved up the misty High Street, a laughing, chattering group, and Jack parted from them at the shop door, with a hearty hand-shake whose pressure lingered on Topsy's fingers like reassuring words.

"I'm coming up with you," said Susy, when at last Mrs. Waterworth suggested that Topsy was tired.

They went into the little room which seemed to have grown so freshly and immeasurably dear, and Susy, sitting down upon the bed, began a full account of her own love-affair; how "William" had never left off thinking about her; and how, if it had not been for Jack, they would never have been reconciled at all, for each was too proud to make the first advance, but that Jack had told her how unhappy William was, and told William how unhappy she was, and so it had all come right.

"But I don't think poor Jack's very happy, himself," added Susy, more gloomily.

Perhaps she hoped that Topsy would continue the subject, but Topsy had become suddenly tired, and only said she must hear more about everything to-morrow. If she meant that she must hear more about Jack, the event justified her words.

Soon after breakfast she went into the garden, and wandering between the well-known bushes, paused suddenly at that seat where Susy and Jack had sat one evening.

"Oh, what a fool I was! What a fool!" she said, aloud, putting her hands before her face.

"Topsy!" said a voice beside her, and dropping her hands, she saw Jack.

"Oh—Jack," said Topsy. "I didn't hear you come."

"I came to see how you were after your journey," said Jack, looking a little less self-possessed than usual.

He sat down upon the bench, and Topsy sat down at the other end. There was an uncomfortable moment of silence.

"I wonder you can leave the shop like this in the morning," said Topsy. The silence had become too painful; she felt that she must say something, and now that she had said it, she wished that she had said anything else.

"There's William, you know, now," said Jack; "and if there were nobody, I should have come, all the same."

He had quite recovered his ease of tone again. Topsy looked down and bit the ends of her fingers. He moved nearer to her and bent forward to catch her averted face.

"Yes, I should have come all the same. I couldn't have stayed away, now I know you're back again. You don't know how I've felt, all this time you have been away."

"Yes?" said Topsy.

"You know, Topsy, I did think at one time you cared for me a little—you as good as said so before I went to Alesborough."

She said nothing.

He went on; "And now you're so changed—whatever I do seems to put you out, and you're so quiet, and you look so unhappy, I can't make you out."

"I'm not unhappy," said Topsy, still looking down.

"Then I tell you what, Topsy—*I* am. I've cared for you, and thought of you, and worked for you, ever since we were little children—and now—"

He stopped, and marked angry half circles in the sand with his nailed heel.

"We can't go on like this—it's no good—I shall only keep on hanging about, and making a fool of myself. If it wasn't for father I'd enlist. And I'd always looked forward to your being there with me in the shop, and hearing you talking to people in that pretty way of yours—and you such a favourite with father too—and the house would have been so pleasant, and we should have been so happy—" He broke off short.

"And why can't that be now?" asked Topsy, very softly, turning her face slowly towards him, and blushing to the roots of her hair.

The sudden change of Jack's face was something to see.

"Do you mean it?" he cried, catching both her hands.

She looked up at him with a half smile.

"Should you like to know why I went to London? It was because I thought you were engaged to Susy?"

"To Susy!" exclaimed Jack, half amused and half indignant.

"And do you know why I came back?" Topsy

went on. "It was because I found you weren't, and because I couldn't stay away from you."

The half smile had become quite a smile by this time, and was reflected from Jack's face with even greater brightness.

Neither of them spoke again; the double smile died out into perfect serenity; they sat silent in a happiness too deep for words.

The birds sang in the elder bushes behind them, soft, white cloud-streaks floated leisurely overhead; the world was green, and young, and warm with summer-time, and sweet with the scent of elder blossom; and peace lay upon the garden, and upon the green churchyard beyond, and peace was in their hearts.

THE
TROUBLES OF AN AUTOMATON.

THE TROUBLES OF AN AUTOMATON.

EXHIBITION OF NEW AND IMPROVED MECHANICAL INVENTIONS.

BUCKINGHAM ROOMS, STRAND.

NOW ON VIEW.

MR. SLADE'S FAMOUS CHESS-PLAYING AUTOMATON.

This extraordinary piece of mechanism may be inspected from ten to four daily. Persons desiring to test the Automaton's powers are invited to play against it, at a charge of one shilling per game.

THIS announcement, conveyed to the public through the medium of scarlet and black posters, had for some months attracted a good deal of the public's attention. Chance passers-by, who would otherwise have paid little regard to the new and mechanical inventions, laid down their sixpences for admission, and stood grouped round the automaton's chess table in full expectation of being

able to discern the trick by which it was moved. The five minutes which such a passer-by had mentally allotted to his visit would lengthen into tens and twenties, as he gradually became interested in the conflict before him. As one player after another retired discomfited, the spectator would become more and more convinced of his own ability to outdo the automaton, until at last he paid his shilling and took his seat, full of hope, at the table. The automaton would then be wound up by means of a large key applied below its left arm, and the game would begin. Occasionally—very occasionally—the visitor succeeded in wresting a hard-won victory, but, as a rule, the automaton was more than a match for its human antagonist, and, as but few men have the strength of mind to desist after losing a first game, the conquered player was pretty certain to demand a second, to the loss of his own time and the great increase of Mr. Slade's shillings.

At five minutes to four Mr. Slade announced that no further game would be begun, and the visitors one by one departed. Mr. Slade then carefully locked the door of admission, and applied the large key to the automaton's ribs as before. The whole of the figure's left side would then swing slowly forward, a human foot, clad in a grey worsted stocking, would cautiously emerge, and a slightly-built, very lean young man, in waistcoat and shirt sleeves, would come forth, shaking himself

and stretching his limbs. Spectators were carefully excluded from this explanation of the marvel, but to an intelligent spectator the second marvel would scarcely have been less than the first, for man and model were, to all appearance, so nearly of the same size, that it seemed they must have been fitted together as one straw hat fits into another. But the human frame is very compressible; I myself knew a young lady of five feet ten who could pack herself in, and shut herself down, in a tin trunk that looked about capable of containing a Skye terrier.

The figure was closed again, shutting with a sharp snap, and the two men went out by a door leading into Mr. Slade's private office. From this office opened a smaller one, in which Mr. Slade's clerk was supposed to spend his days, and in which, as a matter of fact, he kept his coat, his boots, and his dinner. By four o'clock this clerk of Mr. Slade's generally looked somewhat pale and exhausted, and fell upon his dinner without many words. His spirits returned as his hunger left him, and he was accustomed to leave Buckingham Rooms at a little before five, in quite a cheerful frame of mind, and to lounge slowly homewards to his lodgings in a world-forgotten little square in the rear of Regent Street. He lived there quite alone, saying little, seldom receiving visitors, and paying his rent every week, like a very paragon of lodgers. His landlady, a thrifty widow with three little

boys, had often been heard to declare over a friendly cup of tea that "our Mr. Bannerman" was the most satisfactory gentleman whom, to use her own idiom, she had ever "done for." Yet, since even the most satisfactory of gentlemen cannot be perfect, she generally added that she could wish Mr. Bannerman's looks did more credit to his keep.

The shortness of Mr. Bannerman's business hours left him long leisure mornings and evenings, which he by no means spent in idleness. The room in which he worked and ate was strewn with odd little instruments, chips of wood, and rough pencil sketches. A deal easel, grey with use and age, leaned as if exhausted in one corner, and near it two or three small canvases, with their backs towards the spectator. A table stood close beneath the window to catch as much light as would consent to fall upon it, and under the table lay a well-worn japanned paint-box. There were three chairs in the room, but there was seldom one available for use. Palettes, books, papers, and stray pocket-handkerchiefs, lay in a confusion which, if not artistic, was certainly artist-like. In this room Mr. Bannerman spent his spare hours, cutting little pictures on wood for a present living, and painting larger pictures on canvas for future fame. As he sat bending over his engraving blocks, which were to provide the illustrations for a children's magazine, his thoughts would wander

away to a glorious future. He pictured a time when the name of Sydney Bannerman R.A., should stand, printed in capitals, in the Academy catalogue, and when Mrs. Sydney Bannerman should look over his shoulder and say, "That face is perfect."

For he by no means contemplated remaining an automaton all his life. His connection with the automaton had been on his part entirely unpremeditated. He had known Mr. Slade in earlier times, and had beaten him at chess while he himself was but a lad at school. Afterwards, when he had come to London and was making a hard fight for a living, Mr. Slade had chanced upon him, and confided to him, under strict promise of secrecy, his idea for a chess-playing automaton. Sydney was boy enough to enjoy the fun of the notion, and was besides in the doubly disagreeable position of being very poor, and of having a special reason for desiring to be richer. This special reason, to state it in its shortest form, was Miss Edith Bentley. Edith's family and Sydney's had been neighbours in the little midland town where he had spent his boyhood, and the attachment which he had first declared at a very juvenile Christmas party had lasted with unusual constancy into his manhood. New strength had been added to it by Edith's coming, on her father's death, to live in London. For the last year she, her mother and sister, had now been settled in Camden Town,

and Sydney had free leave to spend there as many Sunday afternoons and evenings as he chose. Mrs. Bentley shook her head and sighed when an engagement was spoken of, but she never hinted that Sydney came too often or gave his attention too exclusively to Edith. She did, indeed, say in a mild way to Edith that she thought she might have looked a little higher, and that painting pictures was not much of a living. To which saying her daughter listened with outward meekness and inward denial, and things went on as before.

Naturally, Sydney had never suffered a word of the automaton to escape him. He had contented himself with saying that he had taken work in an office for the present, and the feminine household accepted that general statement as sufficient. His secrecy was exposed on one occasion to a pretty severe trial. One morning, when in his character of automaton he had just defeated an elderly gentleman, he raised his eyes from the board, and saw on the outer rim of his very limited field of vision the bonnet of Mrs. Bentley. He scarcely suppressed a gasp as Edith moved forward to the table—Edith, who had played with him hundreds of times, and knew his favourite openings by heart! He controlled himself by a strong effort and played the game through, if not with all his usual skill, yet with skill enough to win it. To his great relief she stood up, and he heard her say to her mother,

"How I should like Sydney to see this!"

The next time they met she began on the subject at once. Had he seen that wonderful automaton? And he did know it was actually Mr. Slade, who use to come to Muddlebridge, who made it?—Yes, he knew that. Edith was much interested.

"Oh, why didn't you tell us? I should have gone to see it long ago if I had known. And it really is very wonderful. Do you know, it beat me quite easily. I wonder whether it could beat you. I should like you to try—perhaps you have though?"

"Yes," said Sydney, not finding any other answer ready.

"And did you win?"

"Why—no—it was a drawn game."

For some time after that conversation Sydney was in dread lest she should pay a second visit, but she never came, and the dread gradually wore away.

His prospects were beginning to brighten. Mr. Slade paid him well; he had a new engagement to share in the illustration of an artistic magazine; and he had nearly finished two very promising little pictures, which were to try their luck, a few weeks hence, at a well-known gallery.

It was mid-spring according to the calendar, late winter according to the weather, when Sydney had been wearing out a very long day, almost unoccu-

pied in his imprisonment. The automaton was exhibited in a very small, square room, which was quite devoid of any other object of interest; the rain dripped with persistent monotony upon the roof, and Sydney, closing his eyes, tired still from his last night's work, fell almost asleep. About three o'clock, however, two men strolled in, and he roused himself for the game. The taller, younger of the two, sat down; Mr. Slade wound up the automaton and went back into his office, and the game began. Sydney found that he had an opponent worthy of his best skill, and gave his full attention to the task. His adversary, also, evidently put forth all his power, and sat absorbed, never moving his eyes from the squares, one elbow on the table, and the other hand on his knee. His companion leaned a little over his shoulder, looking on. There was perfect silence in the room. Sydney had just opened an unexpected check by discovery, and sat, awaiting the second player's move, when suddenly he saw a hand come stealthily forward across the shoulder of his intent antagonist and withdraw a thick pocket-book from the breast-pocket of his coat. Sydney's first impulse was to call out; an instant of recollection stopped him. But what should he do? He scrutinized the features of the thief as far as he could see them beneath his hat. He thought — he hoped — he should know him again.

The player lifted his head from his hand, let his

fingers fall upon a knight, and answered by a move, which at once covered his own king, and left open an attack upon Sydney's queen. At the same moment the second man moved a little back, and Sydney saw the pocket-book slipped adroitly within his coat. He again suppressed an exclamation, and played a move almost at random.

"Hm!" said his rival, looking round at the man behind him, in evident surprise that an automaton should make oversights.

The other took his right hand from the chair back, and said, "Well, I must go. You have beguiled me into wasting too much time already. You must tell me the result next time I see you."

"Very well," answered the player, with a nod. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," returned the other, and walked calmly out of the room with the pocket-book inside his coat.

Sydney fumed inwardly with a hot indignation, which he was obliged to restrain. His unconscious adversary hastened to seize the offered advantage, but Sydney was so much pre-occupied that he scarcely perceived the loss to which he was exposing himself. He debated whether he should speak and throw himself upon the injured man's generosity. Then it occurred to him that the whole thing might be a hoax got up expressly to test the automaton's humanity. He kept silence once more, and tried to give his attention to the

game. But, practised though he was, he was too much disturbed to play with his usual skill, and his opponent gained an almost easy victory. As he rose from the table the winner approached the figure, examined it, felt it, and seemed to measure it with his eye. Sydney was accustomed to such scrutiny, but in his present troubled and excited state he found it unspeakably irritating. At last the player moved away, and Sydney heard him asking questions of the man who took the sixpences for admission.

It would be difficult to describe the feelings which struggling together in his mind. A mingled scene of humiliation at his own helpless position, of anger at the thief's success, and annoyance at the victim's calm unconsciousness was strong within him, but not strong enough to shut out a sense of ludicrousness that brightened his eyes and curled his lips in spite of himself. And there was no possibility of escape from his odious confinement until Mr. Slade should come and release him at four o'clock—too late for any chance of following and warning the loser. Never had any half-hour seemed so long. At last, when he had begun to think Mr. Slade must have forgotten him, and to form unpleasant visions of remaining shut up all night, he heard the leisurely step approaching, and, a moment later, the locking of the door. Then the figure was unfastened, and Sydney sprang forth with an alacrity that quite startled Mr. Slade,

exclaiming with an energy scarcely less startling, "Good heavens, what a time you have been!"

"Time!" said Mr. Slade, "I don't know what you mean. It's not three minutes past, yet."

He looked anxiously into Sydney's face as he spoke, with a half-formed fear less too much chess-playing had turned his brain.

"There's been a man robbed here," said Sydney, breathless.

It was Mr. Slade's turn to exclaim now—

"Robbed! Man! Here!"

Sydney explained, describing the scene dramatically.

"Here he sat, with his elbow on the table; there was my queen, here was the other fellow, leaning over like this. Then, all at once, I saw his hand come down and slip the pocket-book out of the other man's breast pocket. I was so startled, it's a mercy I didn't call out."

"It is a mercy," said Mr. Slade.

"But it made me lose my game, though. I don't know how I played at all. And then to see that fellow put away the pocket-book, and go quietly out of the room, and not be able to stop him. I wonder how I stood it."

And he relieved his feelings by an emphatic stamp of his shoeless foot, which had not been possible while inside the figure. Mr. Slade looked very grave, and seemed to be considering the subject.

"Well," said Sydney, after a moment or two.

"Well," said Mr. Slade, moving forward to close the side of the figure.

"What am I to do?" asked Sydney.

"Nothing," answered Mr. Slade.

"Nothing! Why, his pocket-book may have been ever so valuable."

"Yes; but then again, you know, it mayn't. Besides, you can't do anything; you don't know the man, and if you did, you can't explain how you saw it."

Sydney was silent a moment. What Mr. Slade had said was perfectly true, but his impulse refused to be so easily satisfied.

"It's all very well," he said, at last, "but I can't look on and see a man's money stolen before my eyes, without wanting to get it back for him."

"How do you know it was money?" asked Mr. Slade.

Again Sydney was silenced. He went away into the inner office, and began to put on his boots. Mr. Slade sat down before his own writing-table, and Sydney saw him apparently measuring its length with an ivory paper-cutter. A few minutes later, when he was finishing the last of the sandwiches which formed his dinner, Mr. Slade came in and said rather hurriedly, "Oh, I say, Bannerman, about that man, you know; do you mean to do anything?"

"I shall try to find him out, and warn him, certainly," said Sydney.

"Well, perhaps it's as well; only do be careful. Recollect I should be ruined, simply ruined, if it came to be known that—you see?"

"I see."

"Then, do be careful. Promise me not to say a word that would lead any one to guess *how* you saw him."

"Of course I don't mean to," said Sydney; "I can promise that with a very clear conscience."

"Well," said Mr. Slade, but in a tone of relief this time, and he went back to his own office.

Sydney stood up, and took his hat to go.

"You'll mind now," Mr. Slade called after him, as he passed into the automaton's room.

"Oh, yes, I'll mind," answered Sidney, stooping to unlock the outer door.

He went home, resolved to take measures for the discovery of the theft, but unable to decide what those measures should be. He saw no means of ascertaining so much as the name of the man who had been robbed. He turned and returned the question in his mind, without coming nearer to a decision, and left the consideration at last with a resolve to wait and see.

The voice of a newspaper boy, next morning, suggested the purchase of a *Times* on the chance of finding in it an advertisement for the lost property. Glancing down the second column of the first page, he did indeed find the following announcement:—

"Lost or stolen, yesterday afternoon, between

Buckingham Rooms, Strand, and Temple Bar, a pocket-book, containing Bank of England, and London and Western Counties Bank notes to the amount of £280, besides private and business memoranda, useless to all but the owner. Any person giving information which may lead to the recovery of the same, will be handsomely rewarded. Apply to Messrs. Fuller and James, 250, Parliament Street."

Sydney, on reading this, hastily put together the engraving tools with which he had been busy, and started for Parliament Street. By walking quickly, he would have ample time to get back to the Strand before ten. He had not much considered what he should say when he arrived. He had started with the simple notion of putting right the wrong which he had witnessed, and had not reflected that there might be difficulties in the execution of his plan.

He reached No. 250, Parliament Street, and found the names of Fuller and James third in rank among the many brass name-plates on its doorway. Going in, he asked for Mr. Fuller, and was told that Mr. Fuller did not come till eleven, but that perhaps Mr. James could see him. Mr. James, on inquiry, could see him, if he would step this way.

Mr. James was sitting at a writing-table, with a pile of letters before him, and an open letter in his hand. He looked up with a worried face and eyes that looked as if they had not slept. Sydney at once recognized his opponent of yesterday.

"I saw an advertisement in the *Times*," he began.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. James, eagerly.

"I think I can give you a little information," said Sydney, perceiving for the first time the difficulty of his task.

Mr. James looked expectant. Sydney went on—

"You see—the fact is—you were walking with a gentleman yesterday afternoon, were you not?"

"That was before the money was stolen," answered Mr. James, coldly, evidently disappointed.

Sydney found that it required some courage to bring out his next words.

"Well, he stole your money."

Mr. James started, laid the open letter out of his hand, and looked Sydney full in the face, with a slowly deepening colour upon his own.

"What makes you suppose that

"I don't suppose it; I know it."

"How do you know it?" asked Mr. James, with the same fixed gaze.

"I know he did," repeated Sydney.

Mr. James tapped his fingers impatiently upon the table.

"I suppose you can tell me how you know it."

Sydney felt thoroughly uncomfortable, and heartily repented the honesty of purpose which had brought him thither. He looked down, and could find no reply.

"Well?" said Mr. James.

"I saw him," said Sydney, in desperation; adding mentally, "He shan't get a word out of me beyond that."

"You saw him!" returned Mr. James. "Where did you see him?"

"I am not at liberty to say," answered Sydney, doggedly.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. James.

Sydney thought the tone was one of distrust, and added, after a moment's pause—

"It was in your breast-pocket; I saw him take it out."

Mr. James gave another slight start, and seemed in doubt.

"Can't you give me a few particulars?" he asked, at last.

"No, I can't," said Sydney. "He did take it, and I saw him. I can't say any more."

"Oh, this is nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. James.

"I can't help that," returned Sydney, not altogether pleased at the exclamation. "I have given you my warning; you can do as you like about using it."

Mr. James stood up, and walked about the room. After a turn or two he stopped short, and said—

"It's perfectly preposterous! A man in that position! And, besides, it's impossible; I know I had it when I went into Buckingham Rooms, and he went away before I came out."

"Well—" said Sydney, and there stopped.

Mr. James looked at him, curiously. Sydney felt the impossibility of explaining his position almost maddening. He, too, stood up and put his hand upon his hat.

"Surely, you can tell me a little more," said Mr. James.

"No, I can't," said Sydney.

"You needn't be afraid it shall do you any harm."

"I am not afraid of that; but I am not at liberty to say anything more."

"It doesn't seem a very worthy thing to take away a man's character in that way, without any grounds," said Mr. James, looking hard at his visitor, and seeing a change come into his face as he looked.

"No," said Sydney, "I suppose it doesn't, but I can't help that. I'd tell you if I could."

"Hm!" said Mr. James, exactly as he had said "hm!" when the automaton made that false move yesterday. Then, "Of course, we should be glad to give a very handsome reward to any one—"

"I don't want any reward," interrupted Sydney, "I can't look on and see a man robbed and not tell him of it. However—I'll say good morning."

"Stay a moment," said Mr. James, quite humbly, "I really am very much obliged to you for coming. Would you mind giving me your address?"

"Not at all," said Sydney, laying down his hat, and feeling in his pocket for a pencil. Mr. James

gave him a sheet of paper, and he wrote the address.

"Thank you—thank you, very much," said Mr. James, as he took it. "And if you should feel disposed to let us know any more, you know—"

"I shall not," answered Sydney, decidedly. "It is not my own affair, or I would make no secret of it. I know it looks queer; but I can assure you I am speaking the plain truth."

His face, as he said it, spoke for him better than his words.

"Well," said Mr. James, in a friendlier tone; "I'm much obliged to you for your trouble, at any rate."

Then he opened the door, and Sydney went. He walked to the Strand, conscious that he had not exactly made a triumph of the scene. He felt a little sore at the distrustful reception given to his good intentions, and philosophized as he walked on the ingratitude of mankind.

The persistent rain of the last week had broken at last, and the damp streets were full of people who had been hitherto kept indoors. The automaton, too, came in for a larger share of visitors, and Sydney had not time to brood over his wrongs. When he went home he had to work hard at a rather important illustration that needed all his attention. By the next morning, the whole affair had faded into secondary importance, and his thoughts ran in their usual channel—from pictures to Edith, and from Edith again to pictures.

To-day was again clear and fine, and as he walked homeward, after his work was done, he felt like Sir Ralph the Rover, "the cheering power of spring." His thoughts went back to primrose gatherings in the damp woods round Muddlebridge, and the London streets were glorified by a vision of Edith in goloshes, carrying a large basket of anemones.

Arriving at his lodgings, he let himself in, and was striding upstairs, when his landlady's head peeped forth from beneath the staircase, and his landlady's voice asked, "Is that you, Mr. Bannerman?"

"Yes, Mrs. Stokes."

Mrs. Stokes appeared at full length, and coming close to the step on which he stood, so that her face came very near his, as he leaned over the handrail, said, "Oh, Mr. Bannerman! I didn't think it of you, I didn't, indeed."

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Sydney.

Mrs. Stokes shook her head, and sighed; then dropping her voice to an awful whisper of reproachful surprise, said, "There's been a policeman here after you, and he's going to call again at a quarter to five."

Sydney uttered an exclamation, the exact sense of which escaped Mrs. Stokes. "Did he say what he wanted?"

"It was something about a summons," said the landlady, in the same impressive whisper.

Sydney went up to his room with a step quite unlike the boyish spring—two stairs at a time—with which he had begun his ascent. A summons! He wondered what it could mean.

He was not kept long in uncertainty. He had scarcely seated himself, when Mrs. Stokes announced, "He's called again, Mr. Bannerman," and the policeman walked in. His errand was soon explained. The man whom Sydney had accused was to be tried next day for the theft, and Sydney was summoned to appear as a witness against him. He remonstrated.

"But it's quite impossible. I have a most important engagement, to-morrow morning."

The policeman couldn't help that, but was very sure Sydney would have to attend, engagement or no engagement.

"Will it last long?" Sydney asked, being quite ignorant of the manners and customs of a police court.

The policeman couldn't say, it was rather a 'eavy charge. With that Sydney had to be satisfied. He took care to explain to Mrs. Stokes that he was only summoned as a witness, but he saw that his explanation scarcely shook her opinion that to be summoned before a magistrate at all was a stain upon his character as a man and a lodger. He found his usual industry quite disturbed, and it was only by an effort that he forced himself to chip away at the block of that important illustration.

But he was destined to be disturbed once more. Mrs. Stokes brought him a letter which her eldest boy had discovered in the letter-box. It was directed in an unknown hand, and had no post-mark. He opened it, expecting to find some communication inviting him to the purchase of somebody's superfine lead-pencils, instead of which, it contained two ten-pound notes, folded in a half-sheet of paper. Upon the paper were two lines of writing :—"Stick to your resolution of saying no more, and you shall find it to your advantage."

Sydney was astonished and indignant. "At least," he thought, "the production of this will show that my tale was true."

He quailed a little at the thought of having to tell Mr. Slade that he must absent himself from his automaton duties. Mr. Slade, however, received the information with a resigned, "I told you so" sort of air, and proceeded at once to write a notice that the machinery of the automaton was out of order.

"I daresay it won't injure us much, after all," he said, laying down his pen, with a smile at his own well-turned sentences. "But let me impress upon you, Sydney, to be careful. Do remember how much is at stake, and do not be led into saying anything that may compromise us."

"I won't, indeed," Sydney answered, half amused, and half touched at the earnestness that showed itself in the use of the name by which Mr. Slade had known him in his boyhood.

He went away, quite realizing that a very disagreeable experience lay before him, but bracing himself up with the consideration that nothing worse could happen to him than a severe and irritating cross-examination. "And I'll try to remember," he said to himself, "that the more I lose my temper the better pleased they'll be."

He reached the court and found it a dingy room, not very large, and decidedly ill-lighted. The magistrate sat on a narrow, raised platform, running along the end of the room, his clerk and a few reporters at a table below, and at a still lower table two or three lawyers. On one side was the dock, on the other a witness box, like a half-grown pulpit. A shabby, drunken-looking old man stood in the dock, against whom a policeman was giving evidence. The rest of the room was provided with benches for the accomodation of the public, represented by about a dozen loungers, none of whom appeared to take any interest in what was going forward. Sydney seated himself, modestly, on a backward seat, and found, to his great embarrassment, that everybody turned round to look at him. The interest in him was soon satisfied, and he looked about for Mr. James, whom he presently discovered, sitting on a front bench, and whispering to a man beside him. The man turned his face in Sydney's direction, and Sydney recognized the thief. He felt justly indignant, and wished he had left Mr. James to endure his loss.

The case of the drunken man was soon at an end, and he was taken away through a little side door. Then the magistrate's clerk read a charge against William Harvey, of having robbed Alfred James of a pocket-book, containing £280. There was a little stir, as if before a sermon, Sydney thought. Then a lawyer stood up, and after clearing his throat, began to state the case. He said it was a very remarkable case—one of the most remarkable in his experience. The prisoner was a gentleman of good position—he might almost say, of distinguished position, and the prosecutor was junior partner in the well-known and eminently respectable firm of Fuller and James. On the afternoon of the day in question, the prosecutor travelled from Westminster Bridge to Charing Cross, in company with the prisoner, and afterwards went with him to the Exhibition of Mechanical Inventions, in the Strand. They passed some time in inspecting the various objects of interest, and the prosecutor played a game of chess against the well-known and ingenious automaton there exhibited, the prisoner staying long enough to see the game virtually decided, and then leaving. On arriving at the Bank, near Temple Bar, where he was to deposit his money, the prosecutor found that his pocket-book was missing. He put the matter at once into the hands of the police, and also inserted an advertisement in the *Times*, offering a large reward for any information.

Early the next morning, a young man called upon him and stated that he had seen the prisoner withdraw the pocket-book from the breast pocket of the prosecutor's coat, which was, indeed, the place where it had been. In answer to the prosecutor's questions, he refused to say when or where he saw this occur, declaring that he was not at liberty to give any further particulars. It had thereupon been thought advisable to bring the present charge, but the prosecutor wished it to be distinctly understood that he believed Mr. Harvey entirely incapable of committing the crime laid to his charge, and that the chief object in taking this step was to give Mr. Harvey the opportunity of clearing his character from the baseless accusations brought against him. He would now say no more, but call the prosecutor, Mr. Alfred James.

Sydney listened to this address, at first, with calm attention, but presently with hot, personal indignation. That wise resolution of keeping his temper was quite forgotten, and he felt a wild desire to rise and say—

"You fools, I was *in* the automaton."

Mr. James gave his evidence, which was already familiar to Sydney. It was quickly at an end, and then the usher called loudly for Sydney Bannerman. He stood up, and found a spice of anger decidedly assisted his self-possession.

"Before I give my evidence, I wish to make a statement," said Sydney.

The magistrate nodded.

"This letter was sent to me last night. I will hand it to you, sir, if you please. I think it will show that I had some foundation for what I told Mr. James."

The letter was read, but did not seem to produce so strong an impression in Sydney's favour as he had expected. The magistrate asked whether Mr. James knew the numbers of his lost notes. He did not, but had marked his initials and a date upon several of the Bank of England notes. The two produced by Sydney were handed to him, and he at once pointed out a little inscription, "A. J., 2. 4. 74," upon one of them.

"We may now hear the evidence, I think," said the magistrate.

The lawyer stood up once more, shuffled his papers, and cleared his throat. He began by observing that he had not expected to have to deal with a witness who possessed not only information concerning the missing property, but also a portion of the property itself. He went on to ask whether Sydney called upon Mr. James at his office in Parliament Street, on the morning of the day named.

Sydney answered that he did.

"Why did you call upon him?"

"I had seen an advertisement in the *Times*, from which I learned that Mr. James was the person who had been robbed of a pocket-book the Monday before."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him that I had seen that pocket-book taken by the man whom I now know to be Mr. Harvey."

"Very well; now was that a true statement?"

Sydney felt a twitch of indignation run to his finger ends, but he answered quietly—

"Perfectly true.'

"I may understand you to say, then, that you saw the prisoner, Mr. Harvey, steal a pocket-book from the person of the prosecutor?"

"Yes, from his breast pocket."

"You swear that?"

"Certainly."

"Are you quite certain as to the identity of the parties?"

"Quite certain."

"And you saw this occurrence on the afternoon of Monday, the 4th?"

"Yes."

"Now, will you kindly tell us where you were when you saw this?"

Sydney's fingers closed a little tighter upon the edge of the witness-box, and he looked down.

"I decline to answer that question."

The questioner looked at the magistrate, who said, hurriedly,—

"But a witness cannot decline to answer, unless, indeed, he would criminate himself by answering. Will this answer criminate you?"

"No, certainly not," answered Sydney, almost laughing.

"Then you must answer."

"And what if I don't answer?"

"Then I shall commit you for contempt—contempt of court."

Sydney flushed crimson, with the sudden flush that comes sometimes to faces naturally pale, and the next moment was paler than before.

"Then you must commit me," he said, "for I can't answer."

"You had better consider a moment," interposed the lawyer.

"It is quite useless for me to consider," answered Sydney, addressing himself rather to the magistrate. "As far as I am concerned, any one might know where I was, but the knowledge would injure another person. If you insist upon my answering, I suppose I must go to prison."

"You certainly must," replied the magistrate.

Mr. James here spoke a word or two to his lawyer, who thereupon said, "May I be allowed to put the question to the witness once more, so that he may have an opportunity of reconsidering his determination?"

The magistrate nodded.

"Then I ask you, Sydney Bannerman, will you answer this question: where were you on the afternoon of last Monday?"

Sydney shook his head, and felt as if it might be

possible that he was going to faint. The lawyer again cleared his throat, and sat down; Mr. James looked worried; and Mr. Harvey kept his eyes fixed upon the ground. There was a minute's complete silence. Then the magistrate, in a voice that seemed to Sydney to come from a long way off, said: "I commit you for contempt of court," and also "I remand this case until next Wednesday."

There seemed to be a trifling stir among the audience; other words were spoken, Sydney scarcely knew what; and he was led away through the little side door which had swallowed up the drunken man. He found himself in a bare-looking cell, where half-a-dozen or so of prisoners were sitting on a bench, while two or three policemen stood at ease against the opposite wall.

Sydney's conductor spoke a few words to one of these, who looked at Sydney and nodded.

"If you'd like to have a cab, and go at once, instead of waiting for the van, you can, you know," said the policeman. "Contempt of court, you see, it ain't like some things."

Sydney certainly did like, and a cab was fetched accordingly. The policeman who accompanied him was disposed to be talkative, but Sydney sat silent, feeling, for the present, only a passive kind of despair, and a faint wonder what would happen to him next. It seemed to him that he was a long time in the cab, but, as in a dream, he could not

even approximately have guessed how long. At last it stopped, and he felt the first sharp pang, as he stepped under the gloomy archway, and heard the gate close behind him. The pang gave way presently to the dull nightmare oppression that had held him before. He moved and spoke as they bade him, or questioned him, and had, through all that happened, a sense of almost immeasurable lapse of time. He was led into a little cell, which was very bare, very strong, and very clean. There he was left, and sitting down on the edge of the narrow bed, began slowly to become conscious of himself as a reality, not a dream. He began to think, and his thoughts were even harder to bear than his surroundings.

He thought how Mr. Slade would look for him to come back in the afternoon, and he would not come, and Mr. Slade would wonder what had become of him. And after a time, Edith would look for his coming, and would not know what kept him away, or perhaps she would know, and that would be worse. And his engraving would not be forthcoming at the publishing office. And Mrs. Stokes would shake her head over him for ever; and down at Muddlebridge, the old neighbours would talk about him as they walked home from church.

All of these thoughts followed one another, one by one, as he sat there, with his head bent, and his hands laid together. All of them were bitter, but

perhaps the idea of his engraving lying, unfinished and unattainable, was the bitterest. And then his two pictures, waiting for one final revision, what would become of them? What would Mrs. Stokes do with his many scattered belongings that lay in her now untenanted rooms?

Then he became suddenly indignant, and wondered why he had submitted passively to the wrong that had been done him. Why had he not denounced Mr. Harvey in words which his conscience could not resist? Mr. James, too, must have known, must have seen, that he was telling the truth. He could not believe that circumstances alone could have been thus unjust. They had all been against him; the magistrate had treated him as an impostor, if not even as himself the thief; his own spontaneous warning had been used as a groundwork for persecution; he had been insulted, accused by insinuation, wronged beyond measure. There must be some great fault in the law to render such flagrant injustice possible.

And what was to become of him? He would be kept here, shut out from the world as surely by the walls of his cell as if they were the walls of his grave. And what would be left for him, even if they let him go after a year or so? A year or so! The definitely conceived measure seemed a longer eternity than the uncertain "ever." It would be almost worse to go out into the old life again then, than to give up at once, and be hidden away for

ever. No, if they did let him free, he would never go back to the old life, with the prison disgrace hanging on him like a badge. Thus he said to himself in his first unreasonable anger, finding it hard, as a well-intentioned man naturally does, to believe that he had not been wilfully misinterpreted.

Then he thought, with an intense longing, of the streets outside, the rattle of carts, the shouts of omnibus conductors, the many faces, the free motion, the full life; and here—stillness, emptiness, loneliness, made stiller and emptier by the ceaseless chirping of a sparrow outside, whom no strength of desire could silence. Very slowly the long day drew itself to a close, and the bitterest experience of Sydney's life had spent its first sharpness of novelty.

The next day was better—when once he had got through that first overwhelming rush of recollection that followed upon awaking. Either time or natural reaction made his morning thoughts much calmer and more reasonable. He began to perceive that, hard as his position was, it was not exactly any one's fault, but rather the result of an almost humanly mischievous coincidence of circumstances. He went back over his own conduct, trying to discover the weak point which had exposed him to consequences so disastrous. He saw plainly enough the equivocal appearance of his behaviour to Mr. James, but he could not suggest to himself any

other line of action which would have been likely to answer better. Similarly, though he perceived how damaging to the truth of his story his refusal to answer must have seemed, he was very sure he did right so to refuse. The only means by which he could have escaped from all these troubles would have been by simply holding his tongue, and leaving the police to trace Mr. James's pocket-book if they could. "And I wish I had," said Sydney to himself, as he sat meditating in his prison, but he knew, as he said it, that to do so would have been impossible to him.

The only really doubtful point was that question of acting automaton at all. There had been a certain element of deception in that, but until te-day it had never occurred to him to accuse himself of any moral blameworthiness in the matter. Did it follow, as a necessary consequence, that what was secret was in some measure dishonest? Had he really swerved some little from the absolute line of right, and brought this evil upon himself by undertaking an occupation to which he dared not own? He was not quite sure, but he made a very firm resolve that whenever he escaped from his present durance, he would be an automaton no longer, but work patiently at any humble form of artistic labour by which he could earn his bread. Of course, his engagement with the *Artist* was broken off without chance of renewal. It will be seen that he no longer enter-

tained yesterday's desperate intention of hiding his disgraced life in an unknown grave. He still felt that a great and almost wholly undeserved misfortune had fallen upon him, but he was resolved to bear it and make the best of it.

The next day was less painful, but more tedious, and the other days followed one another in the same prison routine, which would scarcely be less tedious in description than Sydney found it in experience. He walked in the yard for half-an-hour every day, in company with a dozen or so of other prisoners, while two or three warders looked on from a distance, like drill-sergeants, and stopped every attempt at intercommunication. The rest of his time was spent in solitude and meditation, which meditation had a tendency to glide unnoticed into heavy slumber. Two events, however, broke this monotony a little. The first was a visit from the prison chaplain, a young man who was hardly older than himself, and seemed scarcely to know how to regard him. At first Sydney was inclined to be very reserved in his answers, but the evident nervousness of the chaplain inspired a more friendly attitude, and at at offer to lend him some books Sydney's face brightened into the first smile it had worn since he entered the prison. He asked for a Bible, which was accordingly brought to him the same evening, and comforted his loneliness much. On the whole, that visit soothed his feelings a good deal by showing him that the

chaplain did not look upon him exactly as he would have done upon a pickpocket.

The second incident was a visit from Mr. Slade, who was looking quite pale and agitated. A warder was present, but Mr. Slade's feelings were not to be suppressed by the presence of a whole staff of warders. He exclaimed at once,—

"How ill you look, Sydney! And how thin! My dear boy, this is dreadful—simply dreadful."

"Ah!" said Sydney, a little overwhelmed.

"I never thought of this—never. But I have written to the magistrate, and asked him to give me an interview—in private, you understand—and we shall see, we shall see. You must keep up your spirits, you know. We shall soon get you out of this."

"But you can't take away the disgrace of it, Mr. Slade."

"Disgrace! Where's the disgrace? You acted splendidly, Sydney—splendidly. I don't know that I could have done it myself. And you needn't trouble about your engraving; I went to the office, and I told them—ha! ha!—I told them you were confined to your room."

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Slade, very much," said Sydney, relieved from one of his heaviest anxieties.

"No, no, not at all; it's the other way. Now is there anything I can do for you—outside now?"

"There's——." Sydney stopped, with a sudden

feeling that this was no place for Edith's name. "There's nothing, thank you. At least, if you would pay Mrs. Stokes her week's rent, please, and there's that kitten of mine—it was given to me—I should like it taken care of."

"I will see to that this very evening. Nothing else?"

Sydney paused a moment, and then added, not without an effort,—

"Was it—in the papers, you know?"

"Yes—I'm afraid—in fact, I know it was," Mr. Slade answered.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" said Sydney, and covered his eyes with his hand.

"No, don't, don't do that," exclaimed Mr. Slade. "You really musn't give way, you know. It isn't as if you had done anything really wrong. You're not convicted of anything, you know—not at all."

"There is some comfort in that, no doubt," said Sydney, in his usual tone again. "I'm very glad to have seen you, Mr. Slade, It's very good of you to come, though of course it isn't exactly pleasant to see one's friends in this way."

"Never mind; it wont, be for long. We shall laugh over it together some of these days."

Sydney could not yet look forward to such a time, he only sighed. A moment after, the sigh gave place to a smile, as he said,—

"I suppose the machinery hasn't got right yet?"

"No, no. It's a great drawback—makes the

exhibition very empty. Ah, dear me! and a week ago none of this had happened. A week ago, you know, Bannerman."

A week ago! It seemed to Sydney as if he had died and been born again since then.

He went back from that interview with Mr. Slade much more hopeful. If only he could get let free, and keep his engagement with the *Artist*.

On Wednesday, the seventh day of his imprisonment, a change came. He was taken back to the court once more, and kept waiting in the cell behind it for the greater part of the morning.

When he was at last brought into court, he was surprised to see it almost empty, and the few remaining people hastening to leave.

The magistrate also was absent. Sydney wondered what it meant. The last of the spectators was scarcely gone when the magistrate returned and took his seat, with an unmagisterial expression of amusement playing about the corners of his mouth and eyes. He glanced round, and Sydney was called for.

"You were asked last week," the magistrate began, "to tell us where you were on a certain afternoon, and you declined to answer."

"Yes," said Sydney, noticing a change of tone, and fancying the old man looked at him with a kind of interest.

"I received a communication which led me to believe you would no longer decline to answer, if

the court were cleared of idle listeners. We have had recourse to a little ruse to get rid of them, and I will now put another question to you. Were you not inside a certain figure, known as a chess-playing automaton, and exhibited at Buckingham Rooms?"

Sydney smiled, hesitated, and looked at Mr. Slade.

"Mr. Slade gives you leave to speak."

"Yes, I was," answered Sydney at once.

"What!" exclaimed Mr. James.

He was silenced, and Sydney repeated, in full detail, the manner of the theft. Some other evidence which had been obtained by the police was then given, as to the after proceedings of Mr. Harvey, and the whereabouts of the lost money. This evidence, taken in conjunction with Sydney's, was conclusive, and he was committed for trial.

It may be well to say here that, at his trial, the prisoner pleaded guilty, thus rendering unnecessary the repetition of Sydney's testimony, and saving the much endangered secret of the automaton.

"You are discharged, of course," said the magistrate to Sydney. "I am very sorry you should have been exposed to this week's imprisonment at all, especially as I consider you have behaved very well—remarkably well, in fact, though perhaps not quite wisely; but it was the only course open to me under the circumstances."

Sydney bowed, and murmured a confused

"Thank you."

Mr. Slade drew Sydney's arm through his as they went out of court, and explained to him the magistrate's "little ruse."

"As soon as the last case was finished, he asked whether anybody had any applications to make, and they thought it was all over. So then, to make them surer still, he got up and went away. And of course everybody thought there was no more to come, and off they went. It was his own idea, when I called upon him; wasn't it capital?"

Sydney's answer was prevented by a touch on the shoulder from Mr. James, who had followed him and who now said, "I owe you a heavy debt, Mr. Bannerman; will you accept my very sincere apologies?"

"There's no need," said Sydney, somewhat incoherently.

"May I come and see you this afternoon?" asked Mr. James.

Of course Sydney could not say "No," and he went home to his lodgings with the prospect of a visit from Mr. James before him, which did not quite please him.

Mrs. Stokes was very glad to see him, but, oh! so shocked and distressed! "and dear, dear! to think of his getting into such trouble, to be sure!"

Sydney let her talk, hoping that the subject would wear itself out, if its course were not interrupted, and sat down to his engraving, feeling

very much as if the last six days had been a prolonged bad dream.

In the afternoon Mr. James came. Sydney expected some suggestion of compensation, from which he would have drawn back at once, but Mr. James went to work more delicately. He came, he said, to express the very deep regret which he and his partner felt at the pain and trouble they had caused him; and they wished to know if there was any means of publicly declaring the injustice they had done him.

No, Sydney thanked him, but there was no way. "The disgrace of that week's imprisonment will cling to me as long as I live."

"Don't say that," said Mr. James. "If I thought that, I could not forgive myself. But I don't think it is so. May I ask what your plans are? Do you propose—are you continuing with Mr. Slade?"

"No," said Sydney; then he spoke of his engravings and his pictures—"And no doubt I shall do well enough."

Mr. James lifted the two canvases from the floor, and looked earnestly at the pictures. He praised both.

"And these are going to the Suffolk Street gallery?"

"If they will admit them."

Mr. James looked again. "I like this one extremely; I should like to have it myself. Is it still for sale?"

"Not to you," said Sydney. "I can't take compensation in that form."

Mr. James was silent a moment. Sydney replaced his pictures with their faces to the wall. Turning back, he saw that Mr. James looked quite disconsolate, and felt at once more kindly inclined towards him.

"You must not think that I am ungrateful to you and Mr. Fuller," he said, "but I can't—I really can't—have a reward given me for doing what every honest man would have done; you must see that yourself." Then, with a sudden change of tone, "There is one thing."

"Yes," said Mr. James, eagerly.

"There's—there's a family whom I have been intimate with—I shouldn't like *them* to think—— If you would call and tell them—one scarcely can tell such a thing properly oneself."

Mr. James quite brightened. "I will—I will at once. Your story shall not lose in the telling. What's the address?"

Sydney gave it him, and had scarcely time to finish his thanks before Mr. James was on his way to Camden Town.

Mrs. Bentley and her daughters were evidently surprised at his coming, grew rather stiff at Sydney's name, and thawed completely when they had heard his story.

Edith, however, was angry, and scolded Mr. James in a surprising manner. He ought to have

known that Sydney was telling the truth—anybody could always see that. People ought to think twice before they sent innocent people to prison.

"Edith!" said her mother.

But Edith was not to be stopped; there were tears of indignation in her eyes and a perfect storm of indignation in her breast.

"Poor fellow! what he must have suffered all those days! And nobody will know! Sending away the people like that! They had plenty to see them send him!"

"What can I do?" said poor Mr. James.

"Write to the *Times*," said Edith.

"Edith!" said Mrs. Bentley again.

"And so I will," said Mr. James.

So he did, and Edith showed Sydney the letter next day.

There is little more to tell. Sydney is not an R.A. yet, but he has sold both his pictures, and has commissions for more, so that Mrs. Bentley no longer shakes her head over him, even, though he has become so far emboldened as to begin his sentences with, "When we are married, Edith."

As for the automaton, Mr. Slade has taken it on his travels and it is now exhibiting with great success in New York.

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